

# Open Research Online

---

The Open University's repository of research publications  
and other research outputs

## The Labour Process And Class Consciousness

### Thesis

How to cite:

Cohen, Sheila Elizabeth (1986). The Labour Process And Class Consciousness. PhD thesis The Open University.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 1986 The Author

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:  
<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.000049b4>

---

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

---

[oro.open.ac.uk](http://oro.open.ac.uk)

DX 75519/87  
UNRESTRICTED

THE LABOUR PROCESS AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

\*\*\*\*\*

SHEILA ELIZABETH COHEN  
BA(HONS), MA

Submitted for the degree of PhD  
in Sociology

9.5.86

Author's Number: HDL 65049

Date of Submission: May '86

Date of Award: 17.7.86

## THE LABOUR PROCESS AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

### Contents

#### PART 1

Chapter 1	Theory of the Labour Process.....	1
Chapter 2	Control.....	34
Chapter 3	The Capitalist Labour Process.....	67
Chapter 4	The "Real World" of Workers.....	110
Chapter 5	The Political Side of Economism.....	140

#### PART 2

Chapter 6	Case Study 1.....	167
Chapter 7	Case Study 2.....	231
Chapter 8	Conclusions.....	294

HIGHER DEGREES OFFICE

LIBRARY AUTHORISATION

STUDENT: ...*Shelia Cohen*..... SERIAL NO: *H.D. 65049*

DEGREE: ...*Ph.D.*.....

TITLE OF THESIS: ...*The Work Machine / Labour Process*.....

.....

.....

I confirm that I am willing that my thesis be made available to readers and may be photocopied, subject to the discretion of the Librarian.

Signed: ...*Shelia Cohen*..... Date: ...*19.2.87*.....

The Open University

Higher Degrees Office

23 JUL 1987

Authorisation

Pass to

Disposal



## ABSTRACT

This thesis proceeds via a critique of the labour process debate and its central conception of "control" to the attempt to develop an alternative theory of the labour process based on an analysis of exploitation. This involves the use of a classical Marxist model of capitalist economics in which the primary objective of valorisation is emphasised as structuring the organisation of the contemporary labour process. Two aspects of this objective are invoked; that relating to the extraction of surplus value, in which both the intensification and abstraction of labour are noted as continuing tendencies in the development of the labour process, and that relating to the relationship between paid and unpaid labour time, in which the commodity status of labour is seen as central in integrating the issue of subsistence into the heart of the labour process itself.

In locating these interlinked strands in the structuring of the labour process the thesis takes on two further tasks: firstly to demonstrate the centrality of contradictions within the capitalist labour process; and secondly to unite objective and subjective in the consideration of that labour process. This latter task shapes the third theme within the thesis, the analysis of worker response or "class consciousness".

Our argument in this respect has focussed on the need to recognise worker response and resistance as centrally "economistic", but at the same time has indicated the political implications of such response. Empirical material from the two case studies undertaken within the thesis is presented in order to sustain this argument, along with a briefer survey of some published studies. Overall, the analysis holds that while worker response must be recognised as economistic rather than "control"-oriented, such response is rooted in the contradictions of the capitalist labour process, and can thus be understood as endemically undermining its structures.

## CHAPTER ONE

Theory of the Labour ProcessIntroduction

This thesis is about the nature of work, and its impact on workers, under capitalism. As such it comes within the sphere originally designated by Marx as "the labour process". This term has itself recently enjoyed a revival in the context of a vigorous "labour process debate" sparked off in 1974 by the publication of Harry Braverman's influential book Labour and Monopoly Capital (Braverman, 1974 ).

Our thesis is intended as a contribution to this debate. At the same time, however, it is critical of some of its most fundamental assumptions. Chief among these is the notion that a political dynamic of "control" is decisive in governing management/worker relations within the contemporary labour process. In contrast, our argument is concerned to advance an understanding of the economic category of exploitation as central to the analysis of the specifically capitalist labour process.

Our approach, therefore, differs from much of the argument which has followed in the wake of Braverman in adopting a primarily economic perspective on the nature of work. This attempt to redress what has been until now overwhelmingly a reworking of political and ideological themes within labour process theory is extended within the thesis to our treatment of worker response, which we argue is itself primarily "economistic" and centred on exploitation.

In thus questioning some of the widely accepted tenets of the current labour process debate (which themselves are examined in more detail below) we identify our own theoretical position with

some classical principles of Marxist economic theory, chiefly the conception of the capitalist labour process as governed by the central objective of valorisation. As we shall see, while the labour process debate as a whole purports to draw its theoretical inspiration from Marxism, it has effectively abandoned many of these principles. While not insisting on some static model of theoretical rectitude, we nevertheless maintain that the analysis of the capitalist labour process contained within Capital is of considerable explanatory power in dealing with the twin issues of managerial strategy and worker response in this field. What is more, the abandonment of such an analysis within the contemporary labour process debate appears to owe more to a sweeping distaste for "economic determinism" than to any attempt to explicitly engage with Marx's own arguments.

Within the present thesis, then, some attempt is made to reintegrate Marxist economic theory, and in general a more materialist approach which, we argue, more accurately reflects the nature of worker response, into the analysis of the contemporary labour process. The analysis of workers' struggles, the corresponding treatment of managerial strategies and an overarching theory of the rationale of the labour process under capitalism are undertaken within the framework, as we have said, of a concept of exploitation which itself is two-dimensional. On one side, it refers to what is argued to be the central objective of management under capitalism, that of maximising surplus value. On the other, it indicates both the impact of this objective on the workforce in terms of the quantification and intensification of labour, and the relationship between the effort thus extracted and the reward to the labourer.

The theme of exploitation, which is developed more fully in Chapter 3, structures the thesis in two ways corresponding roughly to the two dimensions outlined above. Firstly a theory of the nature of

the labour process under capitalism is outlined in which the quantification of labour, shown in the measurement and setting of calculated targets of output, is identified as a primary feature of the labour process which itself is structured by the general need to reduce socially necessary labour time within capitalist production. This feature is seen as having a two-fold effect on the experience of work through a simultaneous abstraction and intensification of labour. Thus work, within the mass-production semi-skilled manual sector with which we are concerned, is presented in this analysis both as atomised and interchangeable and as requiring high, sometimes impossible, levels of effort. This theoretical description is given empirical content in the accounts of the case studies undertaken within the research in Chapters 6 and 7. In the fuller treatment of exploitation in Chapter 3, an analysis is developed which locates exploitation as central to the structure of the capitalist mode of production as a whole. This is because the production of exchange values or commodities, which defines this mode, is dependent on the production of surplus value within the labour process, which in its turn is defined in terms of the excess of unpaid labour time above subsistence. The price of labour power, and the degree to which production carried out by the worker exceeds this in value, thus become central variables in the functioning and development of capitalist production. The effort/reward struggles which we argue are endemic within the capitalist labour process can thus be seen as focussing on subsistence as against the pressure to maximise the production of surplus value. Workers' attempts to maintain or increase the value of their labour power are pitted against a continual tendency towards its cheapening, either relative to the value of constant capital or in absolute terms brought about by deskilling, a feature to which Braverman has drawn attention (Braverman, 1974 p80ff).

The second use for the concept of exploitation is in exploring and understanding worker response. As we mentioned in the introductory paragraph, most workplace struggles are both economic and parochial; that is, they have been concerned with basic issues of living standards within limits which extend very little beyond the workplace or even the workgroup. Perhaps because such struggles seem to have so little political promise, discussion of conflict within the workplace has tended to emphasise (as we argue in more detail below) the "alienated" nature of the experience of work under capitalism, which can be linked to the tendency towards abstraction of labour indicated above. However, it is in fact rare for overt conflict to occur explicitly over the nature of work itself. The economic nature of most workplace conflict has to be confronted. It is the contention of this thesis that such economicism both calls for recognition in its own right (since it is what workers actually "do") and also carries inherent political meaning.

The political implications of workplace struggles relate first of all to the structural effects of exploitation itself. Thus such struggles both reflect and are a product of the underlying contradictions within the capitalist labour process. In other words, whatever managerial "strategy" is adopted (responsible autonomy, tolerance of "games", bureaucratic control etc.) conflict will tend to surface as a result of the inherently antagonistic relations involved in the nexus of exploitation.

Secondly, because of this irreducible level of conflict, workplace struggles, as well as constantly drawing in new groups from the workforce, have a spontaneous and "explosive" character which has the power to challenge much wider levels of political and state control. This is, of course, an argument which has to be treated with care, given the historical failure of the working class, in

Britain at least, to go beyond reformism. However, it is worth reasserting, in the face of theory which generally sees such struggles as significant only insofar as they go beyond economism, that many if not most of the confrontations which have at least begun to expose the class nature of society have had their roots in a simple defence of living standards. That this is true of, for example, Russian revolutionary struggles is shown in chapter 5, which considers these issues in more depth. The case study material, particularly in Chapters 4, 6 and 7 also provides some empirical examples of the pattern and meaning of workplace conflict.

A third use of the concept of exploitation is, paradoxically, that of helping us to explore the nature of consent. If we accept that the practical meaning of work for most semi- or unskilled workers is as a bargain in which the provision of labour is seen quite explicitly as involved in the employer's purchase of labour power, it is clear that issues such as the translation of labour power into labour will not in themselves be points of conflict. Similarly, the understanding of labour under advanced capitalism as essentially abstract allows for the recognition that workers in this sector are unlikely to take action over issues of working methods and organisation. Rather, resistance will tend to take place around issues relating to the terms and conditions for the sale of labour power, which terms and conditions constitute workers' standards of living. This comparative "indifference" to the provision and organisation of labour itself beyond effort/reward considerations is a recurrent theme in the thesis, developed both within the case studies and in chapter 5 through a reference to Haworth and Ramsie's concept of the "differing universes" of management and labour (Haworth and Ramsie, 1985).

## Marxism and the Labour Process Debate

The position outlined here can be viewed (in one sense) as a development of classical Marxist principles outlined by Marx in his remarks on "the labour process" and taken up in some respects by Braverman. Such principles have generally been viewed since the publication of Braverman's book as constituting the foundations of the "labour process debate". However, it is our contention that the assumptions used in this debate have diverged far from such Marxist principles, if indeed they have taken them up at all, and that in connection with this they have failed to provide an accurate characterisation of the "realities" of industrial life.<sup>1</sup>

The introductory chapters of this thesis are therefore concerned with the content of the "labour process debate", consisting as it does of most contemporary theorising about work, and with the location of our own perspective within it. In the present chapter we outline firstly an argument about the overall direction of the study of work both before and after Braverman, and secondly analyse the major emphases of critiques of Braverman in the labour process debate itself. In Chapter 2 we go on to discuss in more detail the concept of "control" which is identified as central to the labour process debate, and begin to develop an alternative position which is dealt with more fully in the chapter on "Exploitation".

We begin, then, by looking at the lines of development of "the labour process debate" and the way in which these reflect preoccupations which have existed, we argue, for many years in the study of work prior to Braverman.

Such a position runs counter to the common conception of Braverman's book and the response to it as representing a new departure in this

field. Braverman's revival of the Marxist term "the labour process" in his analysis of changes in the structure and nature of work that have taken place over the last 100 years is seen as introducing a Marxist perspective which has been lacking in the empiricist and unstructured area of "industrial sociology". An example of this view is found in Paul Thompson's useful survey of the development of the labour process debate (Thompson, 1983), in which Thompson states that: "Even the best concepts from traditional industrial sociology do not grasp the interaction between social relations and technical organisation within the labour process as a whole" (p21) op cit. The unique contribution of Braverman is seen as lying in his "successful attempt to renew Marx's theory of the labour process and apply it to subsequent historical development, taking a fresh look at skills, technology and work organisation" (p73). Braverman's book is characterised as playing "a pivotal role in later debates because he combined a renewal of Marx's categories with an explanation of the dominant trends in the world of work" (p67).

In spite of this wholehearted endorsement of Braverman's roots in classical Marxism, it is notable that Thompson's concerns within labour process analysis echo those of the labour process debate as a whole in essentially departing from some of the major tenets of classical Marxism. Thus, correctly as far as it goes, Thompson roots the wave of present-day research into work in the fact that "postwar capitalist development had created significant new developments for the nature of work and for class formation" (p67). However, these developments are overwhelmingly characterised in terms of the subjective experience of work, the neglect of which is, in common with most other commentators, the substance of Thompson's criticisms of Braverman. Typically, Thompson follows his historical summary of developments in work and class patterns by (in agreement with Kuhn) interpreting the associated workplace struggles as "further evidence



of an increasing restlessness about the quality of working life and the nature of the job itself" (p68).

The focus of labour process analysis is shifted firmly from the Marxist concern with economic issues of valorisation to the subjective experience of work, an area which need not exclude the former concern but which in practice, for reasons we shall shortly examine, traditionally has done. The direction of the analysis is shown in Thompson's initial criticism of Marx for imposing "a deparation of the spheres of politics and economics, or factory and state" (p58) on the development of both theories of work and socialist thought. The "politics", Thompson argues in common with writers such as Burawoy, Erik Olin Wright and indeed Althusser and those associated with him, must be brought back into the analysis of the economic in production through the acknowledgement (which he claims is absent in Marx) of worker resistance within the labour process.

It is this concern with the superstructural, though often expressed more concretely in terms of a specific focus on subjective worker response, which links the labour process debate in with a broader tradition of "western Marxist" repudiation of economic determinism. At the same time the expression of this concern through an emphasis on workers' response to the experience of "alienating" work and managerial domination carries echoes of two other earlier traditions: the general preoccupation within "industrial sociology" with job satisfaction (or lack of it) and the related concern with the principles and relationships involved in running an organisation. We go on to show how and why labour process theory since Braverman has continued to promote a perspective which retains in a confusing fashion elements of both traditional industrial sociology and the "western Marxist" approach, rather than, as claimed, bringing a creative renewal of Marxist principles into the study of work.

A writer who, like Thompson, has taken on the task of probing developments in Marxism since the second world war, though from a different perspective, is Ellen Meikens Wood in "Marxism without Class Struggle?" (Wood, 1983). Addressing herself to the question of "Western Marxism" Wood argues that the roots of both Althusserianism and Eurocommunism are "ultimately grounded in the same historical reality that has so profoundly shaped Western Marxist theory and practice in general: the disinclination of the working class for revolutionary politics" (p246) opcit. and that the related political strategies have "demanded nothing less than a redefinition of class itself and of the whole conceptual apparatus on which the traditional Marxist theory of class and class struggle has rested ...a displacement of production relations and exploitation from the core of social structure and process, and much else besides " (p248).

A questioning of these fundamental categories is, as we shall see below, a recurring theme of much labour process analysis, so that whether the questioning is in itself right or wrong (and we shall argue that it leads to some important misapprehensions of the nature of workplace struggles) it puts in some doubt the claim to be reshaping the analysis of work in a Marxist mould. Wood continues the argument by tracing the roots of the rejection of "economism" central to both Western Marxism and the labour process debate back to the political attraction felt by the "May '68" generation towards Maoism and the concept of "cultural revolution" as covering "revolutionary movements without specific points of concentration or focused political targets, characterised instead by a diffusion of struggle throughout the political 'system' and all its instruments of ideological and political integration " (p248-249) Wood draws a direct connection between this preoccupation with ideology and "culture"

and the later shift by Poulantzas, one of the leading exponents of this perspective, "from an apparent depreciation of liberal democratic forms towards an albeit cautious acceptance...of the Eurocommunist view of the transition to socialism as the extension of existing bourgeois democratic forms "(p249). In other words, the insistence on the centrality of ideology and power-related politics the analysis of class and work has clear, and far from radical, political implications.

It is no part of the present argument to endorse economism per se, or indeed any version of economic determinism. The significance of economic strategies by workers is, as has been indicated, a major item of discussion in the thesis as a whole, and the issue of economic determinism arises to some degree in this area and in the discussion of deskilling. What we are concerned to argue here is that the reaction against "economism", which extends to a repudiation both of traditional trade union struggles and any analysis of work which emphasises the economic concerns embodied in such struggles, is common both to the broad theoretical tradition of Western Marxism and to central currents within the labour process debate. The debate, rather than launching an analysis of work which can in some way relate to considerations of value in capitalist production, has picked up and enlarged themes within an earlier and broader theoretical tradition, applying these specifically to the study of work. Thus for example Burawoy argues along Althusserian lines (Burawoy, 1978) that "Any work context involves an economic dimension (production of things), a political dimension (production of social relations) and an ideological dimension (production of an experience of those relations)...The so-called economic realm is itself inseparable from its political and

ideological effects, and from specifically political and ideological 'structures' of the workplace' (p274) op cit. On this basis Buraway defines Taylorism, for example, primarily in terms of its function as a "mode of legitimation" (p279). It has become even more common among recent labour process writers to emphasise the overwhelming role of the ideological and political in structuring managerial activity and worker response.

However valuable these ideas, what is being argued here is that they obliterate crucial areas of Marxist theory for the study of work. Although the notion of ideology has a central place in Marxism, it is advanced (as is often critically noted) on the basis of an essentially material analysis of production and society. Arguments as to the relation between base and superstructure are taken up in Chapter 5. What needs to be said here is that in, implicitly or explicitly, embracing the theoretical perspective of Western Marxism, contemporary analysis of the labour process has left many aspects of Marxist theory, mainly relating to capitalist objectives of valorisation and the associated impact of exploitation, essentially unexplored. Further, and as importantly, the Althusserian emphasis on the overdetermination of ideological and political structures also raises the more practical question of how anything is ever going to break through the charmed circle created by these structures. Rather than emphasising the role of working class struggle, as it claims to do, the "Western Marxist" strain of labour process analysis in fact tends to ignore or denigrate the struggles which do take place.

That the theoretical response to Braverman has largely consisted of taking the Marxism out of Marx is further demonstrated within the labour process debate through its challenging of a number of

important Marxist principles. These can be summed up as respectively the centrality of labour to the production of profit, the labour theory of value, and the commodity status of labour. In this way, paradoxically, the specific meaning of labour under capitalism has been removed from the analysis of the labour process. Rather than the consideration of a specifically capitalist labour process, attention has shifted (as some authors spell out explicitly) to the consideration of an ahistorical labour process whose fundamental principles are in various ways denied or contradicted by capitalism. While this argument as to the inherent creativity of labour, etc., is in its own terms worthwhile, it fails to come to grips with the logic of the specific structuring of the labour process under capitalism in terms of the goal of valorisation, and thus simultaneously evades discussion of a relationship central to and constitutive of the capitalist labour process, that of exploitation. We are left instead with a recycled and more sophisticated version of industrial sociology, as some of Braverman's critics are ready to acknowledge. The connections between arguments developed within the labour process debate and the older, less self-consciously "radical" tradition are now explored.

#### Sociology and "Social Relationships"

It would seem somewhat ironical that Braverman's Labour and Monopoly Capital, lauded by Thompson as representing a "return to Marx" (Thompson, 1983, 72) and thus taking discussion of work beyond "even the best concepts from traditional industrial sociology" (Thompson, 1983, 21) has in fact proved a catalyst for the massive expansion of Marxist and neo-Marxist comment on the labour process which itself has turned precisely back to those subjective and "behavioural" issues with which industrial sociology had traditionally been concerned. The pre-occupation with "social relations" which

merge in with "social relationships", or in other words social interaction between groups, at the point of production, is one aspect of this, as we shall consider later. Another is the concern with the content or qualitative nature of work which is demonstrated in the discussions of deskilling, creative potential of labour etc in which the use value aspects of labour are given overwhelming priority over its role in the creation of exchange value. These are the same concerns which are at large in the '60s discussions of "alienating" work and the more conventional worries of, so to speak, applied industrial sociology or "behavioural studies" (McGregor, Herzberg etc) as to how to improve job satisfaction and increase worker motivation. The arguments of Friedman (1977,1978) and Cressey and MacInnes (1977,1980) while written from a "radical" perspective, in fact deal with much the same issues and advocate some of the same solutions: "While labour process struggles may be insufficient for transforming the working class into a revolutionary class...they are not insufficient to changing the organisation of work or investment patterns under capitalism " (Friedman,1977,45) .

In both cases, the concerns and arguments are a response to a real development; the domination of work in the postwar period by the routinised, fragmented, in many cases tightly timed and measured techniques associated with mass production. In both cases, but perhaps more understandably in the case of conventional industrial sociology, the argument skirts round the root causes and fundamentals of working class response to this development. Thus, for example, while the British workgroup based struggles which began in the '50s mainly in engineering were almost entirely concerned with detailed effort/reward questions, the sociology of work both pre- and post- Braverman has, in its concentration on the "alienating" nature of the work itself, abandoned the analysis of such struggles almost

wholly to the sphere of "industrial relations". In this latter sphere some extremely valuable work has indeed been done (Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel, 1977; Brown and Terry, 1978; Edwards and Scullion, 1982) particularly in charting the development of "informal" bargaining strategies, but of its nature such work can partake only to a limited degree of the theoretical perspectives available to sociology as a whole.

Secondly, the analysis of the rationale of "alienating" work conditions has been carried out within the framework, at least for the labour process debate, of the drive for managerial "control" and "domination". The opportunity to explore the material conditions which have led to this breaking down and specialisation of work, in the context of an analysis of intensification of labour centred on the objective of maximising surplus value through the reorganisation of work, is overlooked in this perspective. A focus on the overriding tendency towards intensification of labour can allow us to understand the changing nature of work itself in terms of the economic requirements built into the labour process which in themselves lend large areas of productive work an essentially abstract and quantitative character.

The most important thing to understand about Taylorism is not its use as a means of managerial domination or "mode of legitimation" but its role (and purpose) in integrating requirements of valorisation into the fabric of the labour process. Thus, while before this particular point in the development of capitalism the methods workers used had been very much left up to them, the introduction of time and method (or "motion") study linked the two aspects of the production process under capitalism, defined by Marx as a labour process and a process of valorisation, and explicitly allowed the

objectives of one to structure the content of the other. It is for this reason, arguably, that Braverman describes Taylorism as an explicit verbalisation of the capitalist mode of production" (Braverman, 1974, p86).

Yet this point has been consistently overlooked by commentators both on Taylor and Braverman. Rod Coombes, for example (Coombes, 1978) expresses a typical misconception in the assessment of Braverman's work when he comments that "Braverman is presumably using the term 'mode of production' to refer to the technique of production rather than to capitalism itself (p83). Coomb's reading of this point is perhaps representative of many writers on the labour process in that it fails to appreciate the way in which "scientific management" is intrinsically tied in with the very logic of profitability, rather than being a strategy of "control" or "de-skilling" for its own sake.

Such views can also be said to underestimate the ways in which this quantitative logic(a) can achieve some objective advances in efficiency, such as the cutting-out of needless movements, which are probably what attracted Lenin (much maligned in this respect) to Taylorism. A full exploration of what are arguably some genuinely "scientific" aspects of scientific management is undertaken in chapter 3.

Contemporary analysis of the labour process, then, shares an essentially similar perspective with pre-Bravermanian industrial sociology in that in both cases any sustained attempt to explore the material structuring and impact of work is missing. As we shall see below, the similarity extends to an explicit disavowal by some labour process theorists of any conception of a specifically capitalist labour process, along with a call for typologies and the recognition of complexity which takes us suspiciously close to the neat categorisings of a Woodward or



Burns and Stalker.

At least part of this reluctance to take on any of the more straightforwardly economic aspects of Marxist theory in the analysis of work, despite the obeisances towards Marxism, can be ascribed to the background of many contributors to the debate in organisational sociology. While it is difficult to define the dividing line between the study of organisations and a more "production"-orientated approach, the emphasis of organisational theory on principles of organisational functioning (or alternatively "dysfunction") has removed such theory even further from any location of conflict in the material contradictions within the production process itself. The paradigm of an "organisation" is an office; light, quiet, "production-less". From this point of view any examination of the factors influencing, for example, "workgroup" activity (and organisational theory has moved freely between the study of professional administrators and that of the productive workforce itself) has taken place in a context devoid of any recognition of the material requirements of production and profitability.

It is this "absence" which has been one of the legacies of organisational theory to the labour process debate. "Organisations", or, simply, workplaces, are viewed in terms of sets of social interactions rather than as part of the business of production. Weber defined organisations as "structures of dominancy"; Salaman tells us that they are "structures of control" (Salaman, 1981, 143). While the unmitigated view of organisations as rational and thus effective bureaucracies has been fundamentally challenged, the conflict that is acknowledged has been located within the same framework of relations of authority, legitimation and domination,

rather than, even within the labour process debate, being related to the contradictions inherent in the extraction of surplus value. Thus John Storey, for example, can say in a contribution located firmly within the labour process literature, that "our earlier reconceptualisations of organisations...depicted them not as neutral technical systems but as ensembles of formalised action designed to secure domination" (Storey, 1983, 123). While it is no part of our intention to argue that organisations should be seen as "neutral technical systems", Storey's description does raise the question of what exactly it is so necessary to secure domination over.

Thus organisational theory, while not centrally concerned with production in a capitalist society, has nevertheless "appropriated" at certain points issues of class, trade unionism and workplace conflict, the organisational perspective on which has then been uncritically absorbed into the labour process debate. In contrast to the presentation of labour process theory as representing a new departure from the limitations of orthodox industrial sociology, no such repudiation of organisational theory has taken place. In fact a confused merger seems to continue between the two disciplines, which, given the "absence of production" to which we have referred in organisational theory, could be said to be even more dangerous to the development of a class analysis of work than a more "simple" industrial sociology. Presumably no one writing within the contemporary literature on work and the labour process would wish to claim that theory since Braverman has been totally unmarked by influences from earlier traditions. Nevertheless it appears ironical that a theoretical current which proclaims itself as distinctive in reviving a specifically Marxist perspective in the study of work should have reverted so clearly, via the ideological and political

emphasis of Western Marxism, to the concerns of organisational and industrial sociology. A closer look at the argument within Braverman's book itself, and the specifics of the response to it in the "labour process debate", may indicate some of the causes.

### Back to Braverman

It is not the purpose of this thesis to present a detailed analysis of Braverman's book, or to "defend" it as an unassailable pronouncement on the nature of work in late capitalism. Nevertheless, it is significant that some of the arguments in the book have, in our view, been widely misinterpreted in ways which are common to different writers. We shall begin, then, by briefly setting out what Braverman's book is "about" and go on to analyse the response to it in order to substantiate the case made out above as to the direction the labour process debate has taken.

Braverman makes two statements in his introduction, the first of which has been largely ignored and the second of which has proved controversial. In his first statement, Braverman says that the original motive behind the book is to provide "little more than a study of occupational shifts in the United States. I was interested in the structure of the working class, and the manner in which it had changed " (Braverman, 1974, 3). This then "began to broaden to include the evolution of labour processes within occupations as well as the shifts of labour among occupations...Before long I found myself attempting a study of the development of the capitalist mode of production during the past 100 years " (p4). The second statement is that "No attempt will be made to deal with the modern working class on the level of its consciousness, organisation or activities. This is a book about the working class as a class in itself, not as a class for itself...what is needed first of all is

a picture of the working class as it exists, as the shape given to the working population by the capital accumulation process " (p26). This explicit "opting out" has been seen as an inexcusable defect in Braverman's analysis by many of his critics.

Braverman's initial statement of his intentions in the book makes it clear that his subject matter is the structural or technical development of the labour process under capitalism. In other words he is not concerned with "the labour process" as a set of, literally, social relations, or more accurately relationships, as many more recent labour process writers seem to be (see below) but as a particular technical organisation of work. Second, or rather at the same time, he is concerned with the structuring of that organisation by capitalism; with a specifically capitalist labour process. It is from this point of view that Braverman's explorations into the Marxist concept of "labour process" and his specific interest in the relationship between conception and execution are undertaken. The unity of conception and execution is upheld, not, as some of Braverman's detractors assume, as a feature of a lost but still memorable paradise of "craft control" but as the defining feature of the notion of "labour process" as such, ahistorical, outside any specific class structure, as Marx first defines it in order more concretely and historically to specify the character of this labour process under different modes of production.

To present Braverman's argument in this light is to extrapolate it to a particular logic and level of objectivity not always present in the book itself. Braverman's personal nostalgia for his past as a craftsman emerges clearly enough and can be seen to promote an at times idealistic interpretation of the craft tradition as having embodied a now lost unity of conception and

execution. His own use of the term "control", at which we look in more detail in the next chapter, is itself ambivalent, though this is perhaps not surprising given lack of foreknowledge on how he would be attacked for his use of the concept. But the major project of the book remains the locating and listing of the specific dimensions of the labour process under capitalism.

Thus Taylorism, which systematically works to separate conception from execution as part of an explicit technique for rendering work operations more efficient, is a central focus of the analysis in which "technique" is not a side issue but an integral part of understanding the capitalist labour process. In contrast to almost every other writer in the field, Braverman perceives the crucial point that in "scientific management" there occurs a union of technique or organisation of work and the production imperatives imposed by the capitalist requirement of valorisation.

Under capitalism, production is structured and labour is "drawn out" of the workforce by the overriding objective of producing surplus value. Scientific management explicitly structures the detailed organisation of work in terms of this objective. In this way the content of labour - its use-value aspects - is matched, structured and approximated to its purpose of producing exchange value. The qualitative is shaped by the quantitative. This is what Marx meant by the real subordination of labour, though he never witnessed "Taylorism". The centrality of Taylorism to Braverman's argument is representative of its symbolic and real significance for the specifically capitalist - valorisation-oriented - structuring of the labour process. As the expression of the organisation of production for exchange, Taylorism (or any form of work study) can also provide us with an understanding of the approximation within

semi-skilled work towards the concept of abstract labour which is central to Marx's economic theory and to which Braverman also at various points links his argument: "This mechanical exercise of human faculties according to motion types which are studied independently of the particular kind of work being done, brings to life the Marxist conception of 'abstract labour'. We see that this abstraction from the concrete forms of labour...is not something that exists only in the pages of the first chapter of Capital, but exists as well in the mind of capitalists, the manager, the industrial engineer" (Braverman, 1974, p181).

None of this argument has anything to do with issues of "control" in the sense of domination/subordination relationships. Yet it is the question of "control" which has been overwhelmingly taken up in criticisms of Braverman. An argument has been advanced which assumes that Braverman holds the same conception of "control" as his critics, and that he has used this concept wrongly and mechanistically. It is assumed that this notion of "control" as his critics, and that he has used this concept wrongly and mechanistically. It is assumed that this notion of "control", as in the alleged argument that deskilling is projected in order to give more control to the capitalist class, is central to the book. Yet while Braverman does indeed use the term "control" throughout, it can be argued that his basic standpoint of analysis in terms of economic requirements of accumulation and profitability means that he occupies a different ground on control from many of his critics. While "control" is (implicitly, at least) conceptualised by most of Braverman's critics in terms of "political" relationships of domination and subordination within the workplace, for Braverman the term can be taken to refer to techniques whereby employers more effectively maximise surplus value. The former issue can, of course, be argued to be simply a dimension of the latter. That the two perspectives are in fact crucially distinct is shown in more detail as part of the

argument in the next chapter.

### Response to Braverman

The emphasis on "control" in criticisms of Braverman is in itself, however, only one aspect of the general theoretical stance from which most of the critiques have been written. Having attempted to establish the central position of Braverman's book against what has been suggested are widespread misinterpretations, we now go on to a broader survey of the response to Braverman in order to chart the main lines of the labour process debate.

The overwhelming theme apparent in both early and later criticisms of Braverman (and the response to the book has been almost entirely critical, despite an enthusiastic early reception) is the neglect of subjectivity or worker response from Braverman's analysis.

Braverman's disclaimer that "This is a book about the working class as a class in itself, not as a class for itself"(p 27) is scorned as inadequate to a work purporting to provide a wideranging theory of the labour process. While the details of this critique are comparatively undeveloped in the first responses to Braverman, by the stage of arguments such as those of Lazonick (1983) or Thompson (1983) it has developed into a fully-fledged argument over how the absence of an acknowledgement of worker resistance within the labour process vitiates not only Braverman's argument but Marxist theory on the labour process as a whole, particularly as represented in the concept of the real subordination of labour (see below).

On the basis of this central critique the labour process debate since Braverman has tended to take the form of a development of arguments which will in one way or another make up for this alleged deficiency. These can be said to have taken place within

one or other of two broad frameworks: workers' experience of the qualitative content of their work, and the social nature of relations at work. The former is extended to take, in the "deskilling debate", worker knowledge and the creative potential of labour; the latter to cover a general dynamic of managerial domination and an accompanying "class struggle" which in itself is integral to the development of the labour process. Some associated issues which are more directly connected with the umbrella concept of "control" are further discussed in the next chapter.

First of all, then, the argument over the meaning and implications of the notion of "deskilling". Clearly it is seen as a key proposition of Braverman's book that the development of the labour process under late capitalism has imposed a remorseless trajectory of deskilling and "degradation of work" on the working class. While the overall tendency can hardly be seriously questioned, criticism has tended to concentrate on the "unidirectional" and inexorable nature of this tendency in the Bravermanian perspective. Thus Elger, an early critic of Braverman over this issue, argues that in place of a one-sided analysis like his should come an awareness of the complexity and reversability of the deskilling process, specifically based on an acknowledgement of worker resistance (Elger, 1979).

The role of worker resistance is seen as central in two ways; firstly as playing an integral part in the development of the labour process as such, and secondly as blocking the overall capitalist impulsion towards deskilling. Thus Foster is cited as arguing that working class militancy itself "precipitated major efforts to reorganise the labour process of both engineering and spinning" (Elger, 1979, 73). Again, in contrast to Steadman-Jones' argument that craft workers through struggle managed to retain a formal



status for their skills, Elger claims that "they were transformed and encapsulated within modern industry in ways which sustained significant forms of expertise "(p74).

It is clear that worker response and resistance do play an integral part both in the overall development of the labour process and in its everyday management and organisation. But in acknowledging this, the crucial question remains as to what this resistance is about. For Elger it is clearly seen as about deskilling, that is about the content and possibly the status of types of work. At the same time, the rationale of the deskilling process itself for capitalism is seen not in relation to the technology involved and its potential for increased productivity but as a strategy for weakening organised worker resistance (though to what is unspecified). Thus the allegation that Braverman "is limited in his understanding of the extent to which working class opposition defeated Taylorism and pushed capital to employ more subtle means of control in its quest for authority (Palmer, 1975, 32, cited in Elger, 80) encapsulates both positions. The emphasis on skill as a key focus of worker resistance is sustained in the criticism of Braverman's alleged imputation of "a switch from thoroughgoing craft controls to pervasive capitalist direction of the labour process" (Elger 1979, 63), for failing to appreciate in particular "the manner in which forms of specialised expertise and craft competence may be embedded with a complex structure of collective labour effectively subordinated to capital accumulation "(p63).

It is not so much that such processes do not occur, but that they are not necessarily central to the pattern of worker resistance and managerial decision-making, that we would raise against this argument. Although Elger criticises Braverman for not integrating the specific

"exigencies" of pressures towards profitability and accumulation at different historical periods into his argument, this concern with the economic structure of capitalism is raised more as part of a plea for greater complexity in the argument, and recognition of pressures coming from working-class resistance, than as an attempt to chart the rationale of trends of development within the labour process in economic terms.

In contrast to Elger's argument it may be suggested that workers, while naturally opposed to the erosion of their craft skills as such, will tend to undergo a process of struggle in which while some attempt is made to preserve the content of their jobs as such, the emphasis will be on retaining some of the privileged aspects of pay, job security etc. which go along with skilled work - hence the well-known phenomenon of "red-circling". Even more clearly, a rationale for the implementation of deskilling which must surely be taken into account is simply the necessity to increase the productivity of labour and thereby profitability. Thus Taylorism, which the response to Braverman has seen almost entirely as a strategy of "control" in the sense of domination and suppression of the work-force, must also be allowed a case for examination in its own terms as a technique for breaking down and reconstituting the organisation of work into patterns which could lead to, in Marx's words, a closer filling-up of the pores of the working day" (Marx, 1976, 534). The implication of the "labour process debate" argument about deskilling is that the issues raised can be examined solely within a framework of use-value aspects of the labour process; of workers' resistance to changes in the organisation of these aspects, and managerial strategies aimed at weakening this resistance by further changing such organisation. Questions of the impact of production for exchange value and workers' struggles to defend their standards

of living as a central feature of their interaction with the capitalist labour process are again absent from this analysis.

From another point of view, preoccupation with the use-value aspects of the labour process is well illustrated within the debate by the writings of Cressey and MacInnes (1980). Writing in the context of an examination of capital's "material relation with labour" Cressey and MacInnes focus their analysis on what they see as a key contradiction within capitalist labour processes, the repression and subordination of workers' knowledge and creativity through the hierarchical and power-centred structures of capitalism. Thus while capitalists, by virtue of their whole political and ideological position, dominate and oppress workers within the labour process, they also continually need to call on the knowledge, motivation and creativity possessed by these workers. This constitutes a central contradiction: "It is precisely because capital must surrender the use of its means of production to labour that capital must to some degree seek a co-operative relationship with it...The two-fold nature of the relationship of capital to labour in the workplace implies directly contradictory strategies for both labour and capital..." (Cressey and MacInnes, 1980, 14). In Managerial Preogative and the Question of Control (Storey, 1983) John Storey locates a similar fundamental contradiction, also centred on the qualitative content of production. As part of a call for a dialectical approach to analysis of the labour process, he suggests that "Control structures and strategies typically contain their own inherent contradictions. Braverman implies de-skilling is almost an objective or end in itself. Yet...capital (accumulated, dead labour) requires living labour to continue the cycle of production and valorisation. In the final analysis the inanimate factors of production must be placed in the hands of living labour if surplus

value is to be realised " (Storey, 1983, 8).

Despite the use by both these writers of central Marxist concepts such as contradiction and, in Storey's case, the dialectic, neither makes the point that Marx's concern with contradiction is one used to illustrate the internal tensions within a given system. The very notion of the dialectic indicates an interaction of opposites which are defined in relation to one another rather than to any variable outside the bounds of this interaction. In the emphasis of both Storey and Cressey and MacInnes on the creative potential of labour per se there is an implicit contrast between capitalism and some other, more ideal system which would be able to actively employ this potential. Yet, through this very contrast, the notion of a pure, ahistorical "labour process" is made primary. As Cressey and MacInnes themselves make clear in another paper (Cressey and MacInnes 1977), the "social relations" of capitalism are seen as artificially and illogically imposing their constraints on the development of this "natural" labour process. In this way the useful aspects of production, rather than the exchange-value aspects which in fact dominate within capitalism, become the exclusive function of analysis. The location of central contradictions within capitalism in the arena of the qualitative or use-value-related content of work - methods, expertise, creative initiative - indicates, as we argue throughout, a significant absence within the labour process debate of any serious attempt to get to grips with the dynamics of value creation as they operate within the capitalist labour process.

If the organisation and content of the capitalist labour process is seen as revolving round a dynamic of worker resistance which in its turn centres on the qualitative or "use value"-oriented

aspects of the labour process, we are left without, as it were, a material handle with which to grasp the basis of existing worker antagonisms and capitalist imperatives which daily surface within the capitalist enterprise. Without denying the salience of workers' subjective experience of the content of work, it is the contention of this thesis that economic issues centring on the struggle to maintain and improve living standards form the major focus of worker resistance in the context of workers' "given" position as sellers of their labour power.

It is worth mentioning in the context of these arguments that there is a widespread hostility to the notion of "real subordination of labour" particularly among those writers who emphasise the importance of resistance by workers on "control" grounds. The notion of real subordination has, as we argue in more detail in Chapter 3, been widely misinterpreted as implying a political repression and subordination by management of workers within the labour process - a point which Marx specifically denies (Marx, 1976, 1026). It is significant that many writers within the labour process debate have interpreted a crucial Marxist argument about the development and impact of the valorisation objective within capitalism in terms of a purely political domination and subordination (which they argue is countervailed by worker resistance against this political repression). This almost exclusive focus on the "social" aspects of the capital/labour relation at the point of production is examined in the next part of the argument.

Littler and Salaman (1981) illustrate this concern with "social relations", the second focus of analysis in the labour process debate, in their complaint that "throughout Braverman's analysis there runs a highly mechanistic, deterministic strain whereby

relationships, once established as necessary, are regarded as satisfactorily understood and explained. Braverman is not interested...in questions of how these theoretically required relationships are actually organised and structured in practice." (p251). The point is echoed (in fact predated by) the arguments of Richard Edwards, particularly in an article itself entitled "The social Relations of Production at the Point of Production" (Edwards, 1978). Here he declares that "Whereas Braverman concerned himself primarily with the technical aspects of the development of the labour process - "technical" in the sense of workers' relations to the physical process of production - my analysis will focus on the developing social relations of production at the point of production " (p110). From Edwards' subsequent argument, it is clear that it is the issue of "control" (simple, technical and bureaucratic) that he has in mind in making these emendations. However, in the same way that the concept of "control" is itself highly ambivalent and "loaded", the recommendation to explore "social relations" (to which John Storey, as quoted on p.17, adds his voice) appears based on an elision whereby what are undoubtedly "social" relations - the relations of production specific to capitalism - are transmuted into social relationships in the sense of the interaction between groups at the workplace. It is unquestionable that both the technology and the patterns of command and conflict within labour processes are bound up with the mode of production and ensuing relations of production within which work takes place. In this sense the nature of work is indubitably "social". But these "social"/production relations must not be reduced to the level of aspects of social interaction surrounding purely "power" relationships at work. Issues such as exploitation and the quantitative structuring of work towards profit-defined targets

must be taken into account when discussing the structuring of work itself by the capital/labour relation.

That an analysis based on production relations has been allowed to merge into one primarily concerned with the nature of interaction between groups is particularly clear in the writings of John Storey (1983). After the statement defining organisations as "ensembles... designed to secure domination" this author goes on to say that "Work organisations therefore will be viewed as social outcomes and more specifically as emergent properties of class struggle. In place of technological determinism our model posits social relationships shaping the technology which is created and which in turn reacts upon social relations " (Storey, 1983, p123).

This is perhaps a key passage in locating some aspects of contemporary labour process theory within what amounts to a sophisticated version not so much of industrial sociology as social psychology. The argument can also be recognised as a small-scale repetition of the pleas of for example Thompson and Burawoy for the integration of the "political", ie labour process terms the existence of conflictual social relationships at work, within the economic. Such arguments have been extended by many writers in the assumption that struggles within the labour process function on the reproduction of the relations of production themselves. This point is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

In focussing attention on "social relations", critics of Braverman clearly intend to paint a more realistic picture of the shifting patterns of conflict and consensus at work. But if we approach this undoubtedly complex and contradictory area unarmed with the "deterministic simplicities" of Braverman or Marx, what framework are we to use to make sense of it? The criticism of labour process

writers' project of exploring detailed patterns of conflict at work is not intended as a denial that such conflict exists - quite the reverse. The argument is put to make the point that such conflict cannot be considered in isolation - simply as a "given" fact about the relations between managers and workers and work which is itself explained in self-defining terms of managerial domination and worker antagonism. We need to look at these relationships, but we also need to look at the structure of valorisation and exploitation that lie beneath them. This thesis is a plea for, and an attempt at, an analysis of the labour process in these terms.

### The Centrality of the Labour Process?

Two further points are worth making. The first is that in defining the labour process simply as the site of "control" struggles, "class struggle" over such overtly political issues as worker resistance to the relations of production in themselves, political relations of managerial domination and so on, labour process writers themselves have, as it were, put the final nail into their own coffin. It is not surprising that writers like Littler and Salaman end up arguing against "the continued centrality of labour and the labour process" (Littler and Salaman, 1982, p257). If the labour process is simply a shell in which a few rather inconclusive battles for control are fought, rather than, as we would argue, the crucial site for the production of surplus value which continues to sustain the capitalist economy, it can hardly continue to be of much interest to theorists concerned to get to the heart of contemporary relations of production. As we see in Chapter 3, this argument as to the purely "control-centred" significance of the labour process and thus its irrelevance to important economic concerns is put also by political economists like John Roemer (1982) who see themselves as centrally concerned with exploitation. To argue that the labour process is in fact



constitutive of production relations under capitalism (or, in fact, any other mode of production) is to some extent to attempt a defence of the labour theory of value, a task we take on in Chapter 3. For the moment, however, it can be said that the argument that the labour process is much more than simply a bundle of "control" relations is the central theme of this thesis.

A second point relates to the critique of labour process writing which has been put within this chapter. The argument has been that labour process writers have apparently embraced, but have then largely disregarded, classical Marxism. This argument has not been put in order to embrace some ritualistic shibboleth of Marxism as tablets of stone. It has been put to make the point that there is a wealth of analysis of the labour process within classical Marxism (eg in Volume 1 of Capital) which appears to have been more or less ignored by contemporary writers in examining the labour process. This material deserves to be used, and not merely out of archival interest. It deserves to be used, in our view, because it encapsulates a theory of the labour process which, ironically, can reflect the nature of worker response (and managerial strategy) far more accurately than the kinds of perspectives on the labour process which we have attempted to survey in this chapter. This thesis attempts to demonstrate this point both theoretically, and, in the case studies, empirically. The thesis can be regarded as an attempt to use the principles of classical Marxism to analyse the contemporary labour process.

### Summing Up

In this chapter we have attempted to draw out two contrasting approaches to the study of work under capitalism. In the first, which we have argued both pre- and post- dates Braverman, work is

seen essentially in qualitative terms - as a process of making things, of handling materials and tools in order to create a useful product. This may seem a logical and indeed unquestionable way of looking at work. However, the capitalist mode of production is rarely logical and frequently questionable; and it is within this mode of production that the second, our own approach, is located.

Through recognising the existing dynamics of this system we arrive at an analysis of the contemporary labour process within manufacturing in which work is examined for what it is; a quantitatively assessed, frequently interchangeable and thus "abstract" series of movements structured by the requirement of profitability, to which workers not unnaturally respond with a similarly pragmatic and "cash-nexus"-orientated approach.

While this is a harsh picture which in practice may be frequently modified, the contrasting emphasis on what is in effect a "pure" labour process overlaid with solely political and ideological constraints emanating from capitalism appears to us to offer a curiously unrealistic perspective bereft either of the economic constraints which actually govern the operation of the capitalist labour process or of any recognition of the overwhelmingly "economistic" nature of workers' real response. Such omissions are perhaps compounded most of all in the debate's conception of, and major emphasis on, the notion of "control". It is this concept which we go on to define, and criticise, in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Control

"Control" has emerged as a key concept in the theoretical development of labour process analysis surveyed in the last chapter. While used with a confidence which suggests that its meaning is widely understood, the concept nevertheless carries a wide range of perhaps unexamined implications which we now set out to explore. It is suggested that the analysis projected in these implications falls short of a full understanding of the forces influencing the nature of work under capitalism, and in particular that it indicates a profoundly ahistorical view of the labour process.

In contrast to the perspective thus criticised we shall attempt to show how managerial activities and patterns of worker response which have tended to come under the loose heading of "control" can be analysed in terms of the structuring of such interrelationships and techniques by requirements specific to capitalism. The forms of "control" will be shown to be constructed by profitability, rather than being, as they are frequently depicted, a condition of it. The interrelation of "control" and "efficiency" will similarly be considered and a specifically capitalist "model" of efficiency demonstrated. It is in terms of these two overriding requirements - profitability and a quantitative understanding of efficiency - that the concept of "control" can, we submit, be most usefully understood.

### Centrality of "Control" to the Labour Process Debate

That the concept of control has both been central to the arguments of the post-Braverman debate and assumed to be central to those of Braverman is taken for granted by writers within the debate. Littler and Salaman, for example, refer in their introduction to "Braverman's analysis of a process as central to his analysis as it is to the

capitalist labour process - the organisation and achievement of control (Littler and Salaman, 1982, p251). Yet the concept itself, despite its crucial significance, has so far escaped being subjected to any rigorous analysis. As Cressey and MacInnes, themselves vigorous proponents of the concept, justifiably complain: "Despite the significance of control (and its close conceptual partner 'power') it is a concept that is woefully inadequately theorised, when it is theorised at all, so that it is used in a contradictory fashion not only by different writers, but even by the same writers in different contexts" (Cressey and MacInnes, 1977, p280).

In response to this lack of clarity, and what we see as the significance of writers' use of this concept, it will be the aim of this chapter to explore the assumptions implicit in this use and to reconstruct an understanding of "control" located in the historical specificity of the capitalist labour process.

### Theories of "Control"

There appear to be three main strands of argument or approaches to analysis of the labour process involved in the use of the concept of "control" by labour process writers. These will be examined in turn and their significance for the overall understanding of the labour process assessed.

#### (i) "Forms" of control.

Considerable amounts of the literature appear to be devoted to the argument that the dynamic of control is not as mechanistic or one-directional as, it is alleged, Braverman suggests. Andrew Friedman is an early contributor to this position, with his theory of "responsible autonomy versus direct control" (Friedman, 1977). The invocation of a dual management strategy - the first strand of which "attempts to harness the adaptability of labour power" and thus to

"capture the benefits of variable capital", and the second to "limit its harmful effects and treat workers as though they were machines" (p49) is made specifically in order to emphasise the salience of resistance by workers, a factor which, it is alleged, both Marx and Braverman damagingly neglect. Thus, typically, Friedman introduces his article with the allegation that "Marx and Marxists have presumed the development of the labour process under capitalism to involve a progressive rise in direct managerial control...Harry Braverman, in particular, has argued that the organisation of work during twentieth century capitalism has been guided by Taylorian principles which would ideally involve the control of all worker time and movement..."(p43).

Like many criticisms of Marx in this respect, the first statement is textually inaccurate; "control" is not a central concept in Marx's analysis of the labour process. However, the purpose of the introduction for Friedman's argument is that both writers have neglected those levels of worker resistance at the point of production which may actually have a practical effect in changing the organisation of production, as opposed to overthrowing the system altogether. It is these forms of resistance, described as causing "accommodating changes within the mode of production", which are seen as lying behind the development of diverse forms of worker control by management.

A still more influential writer within this perspective has been Richard Edwards, whose analysis of the labour process in terms of a 3-stage periodicisation of "simple", "technical" and "bureaucratic" control (Edwards, 1979) has gained widespread acceptance within the debate. The notion that capitalists do not rely on a single "strategy of control", and that the alternation between technical and bureau-

cratic forms represents significant room for manoeuvre is indeed the focus of many more recent contributions which emphasise the availability of choice in managerial strategy as opposed to what is seen as the one-dimensional trajectory imposed by Marx and Braverman.

Marx and Braverman, we repeat, cannot justly be accused of operating with the same authority-related model of "control" as these authors, but this is not the main point we wish to make here. Rather, we would emphasise that while it is undeniable that complex and differentiated forms of organisation and direction of the labour process exist, to focus on them within the particular conceptual framework implied by the term "control" is to lend this framework an exclusive emphasis which crucially limits our understanding of the capitalist labour process. Thus the use of the term 'bureaucratic control' implies that strategies which in fact are directed at the incorporation of organised labour in a context of what can most briefly be summarised as "industrial relations" are part of the same problematic of authority relations directed at regulating the production of use-values as is indicated by the term "technical control". Similarly, the use of the term "structures of control" implies that all aspects of the factors which influence managerial and worker activity at the level of the labour process, from plant ownership to organisation of working methods, are embraced within the same framework of essentially power and authority relations.

For many labour process writers, then, the labour process is "control". As we attempted to show in the last chapter, arguments which take the issues which surface within the labour process up to the sphere of employment relations in order to see them as worth attention paradoxically dismiss the labour process as "merely" a

site of control issues. In the same way, to see the labour process as exclusively invoking strategies of control is to draw misleading distinctions between, amongst other things, the organisation of the labour process itself and issues surrounding terms and conditions of employment which have normally been seen as the sphere of "collective bargaining". As we have argued, the very concept of "bureaucratic control" as expounded by Edwards encapsulates this approach. We now go on to make more explicit our critique of the centrality of "control" as an explanation of labour process dynamics by undertaking a more thorough going exploration of the concept itself.

#### (ii) Labour and Labour Power

One useful way of getting to grips with what many labour process writers are getting at when they talk about "control" is to look at the use of the concept in arguments on the translation of labour power into labour. Braverman is praised by Littler and Salaman (1982, p252) for recognising the distinction between these two aspects, but deplored for ignoring it in his later analysis. Friedman roots the issue directly in his understanding of managerial "authority", about which he attributes the same view to Marx: "The second sort of managerial function is to exercise authority over workers. Marx emphasised this managerial problem under capitalism by calling labour power variable capital" (Friedman, 1977, p48).

In fact Marx coined the term "variable capital", as is argued at more length in the next chapter, in order to indicate not a "managerial problem" but a potential for the expansion of value via the "fermenting agent" of labour. This is not to deny that the sale of labour-power by a worker to a capitalist constitutes an unusual kind of bargain in which the quantity and quality of the goods cannot be specified in advance. Labour process writers have, however, in our

view exaggerated this indeterminacy of labour in an argument which takes as the central issue the willingness of workers to surrender labour as such. This is seen as a central focus of "control" strategies: "To translate legal ownership into real possession the employer must erect structures of control over labour" (Littler and Salaman, p252). Edwards makes the same point: "Labour power can be bought, but between the purchase of labour power and the real appropriation of labour power comes a wedge; the will, motivation and consciousness of the worker..."(1979, p111). He has earlier argued that, for the same reasons, "Employers not only co-ordinate, they also compel...capitalists must seek to convert the labour power they have purchased in the marketplace into useful labour under conditions in which the possessor of the labour power has little to gain from providing useful labour"(p110).

In other words, it is the attitude of the worker ("will, motivation, consciousness") which is seen as justifiably getting in the way of the employer's requirements at this point of translation. Friedman sums this up: "The problem is that people are not machines. They may sell their labour power but they cannot alienate their minds or their will. According to the direct control strategy capital must continually subdue workers' independent and often hostile wills by appealing to their economic self-interest. Here we have the second problem with the direct control strategy's vision. The will of workers is not guided simply by economic self-interest" (1977, p50).

While this is true, a further problem is that Friedman has not specified what workers' wills are actually hostile to. If it is indeed simply to the use of their labour power as labour, it will indeed be necessary for employers to "erect structures of control" merely to ensure that workers work at all. However, there is ample



evidence that it is only at quite high levels of intensification of labour that workers resist the obligation to work as such. Otherwise, the work behaviour implicit in the exchange of an employment contract is normally "pragmatically accepted"; a somewhat value-laden indication of this being contained in the slogan of "A fair day's work for a fair day's pay."

The fact that the writers cited above have had recourse to ephemeral notions such as "will" to characterise worker resistance indicates a fundamentally moralistic approach to the labour process which itself entails a lack of understanding of the forces at work within that process. While workers' resentment at their dehumanisation is indeed a powerful force demanding recognition, it has not, perhaps fortunately, in itself been catalyst for tangible forms of resistance. And though the opposition of interests in terms of ownership is a factor the centrality of which our own argument confirms, explicit recognition and repudiation of this by workers at their everyday tasks in the labour process cannot realistically be seen as a focus of resistance or of managerial "control" strategies. The level of authority commonly assumed by labour process writers to be necessary simply to keep workers at work (see also Friedman 1985) is in most production contexts obviated by the existence of a widespread structure of machinery, measured times, work layouts and production flows which to a considerable extent in themselves ordain work from workers. Workers may indeed not work at the levels of intensification of labour required of them, but this is a rather different matter to be discussed in more detail in the next chapters.

What emerges from this location of "control" arguments in the labour power/labour distinction is that those who place issues of control at the point of alienation of labour no longer wish to see labour

power as a commodity. Indeed, this view has been made explicit by some recent writers (MacInnes, 1984, Gintis and Bowles, 1979) whose views will be examined in more detail in the next chapter. Briefly, the argument is that labour power is a "commodity" so affected both by broader ideological and political factors (family, schooling, state, etc.) and also by its own use-value aspects which employers cannot afford to ignore (in terms of the need to gain co-operation from the workforce in order to get production out at all) that it can no longer be regarded, like other commodities, in purely economic terms.

As against this, for the moment we would argue simply that while labour power is indeed a unique commodity in the sense, amongst other things, of being able to create a value greater than its own, the evidence is that workers themselves ~~do~~ regard it in pragmatic terms as a commodity, or a bargain their side of which they are prepared to "reasonably" fulfil, and that it is not the alienation of their labour which normally promotes resistance but aspects of the terms of sale of their labour power - in other words, their own "living". Thus managerial "control" strategies are directed not primarily at coercing workers into providing labour but at fragmenting and reconstructing work patterns in a manner which will provide the greatest possible productivity from the labour power available to them. This argument is expounded in more detail below.

### (iii) Social Relations/Subordination and Domination

Most of the other strands of the "control" argument, which as we have seen are not often explicitly untangled, can be gathered within a general sphere of a view of the labour process primarily in terms of relations, or relationships within the workplace, of authority

and domination. Although most of the arguments overlap and inter-relate, the following subsidiary views can be found amongst them:

(a) Social Relations in the Factory: "Bosses and Bossed"

We have already seen in Chapter 1 how the Marxist treatment of production relations as essentially social has been transmuted within contemporary "labour process" arguments into a traditionally sociological concern with social relationships between groups. The nature of these relationships is viewed "radically" as imbued with conflict, but the issue of what the conflict is about has been lost in a circular argument whereby managerial control strategies are shaped by the need to subdue worker resistance which in its turn is assumed to be resistance against managerial domination.

The central focus of analysis of "control" relationships within the factory, then, has been this nexus of domination and subordination, which in the less analytic moments of the argument is assumed to simply "be". Richard Edwards' argument in the "Social Relations of Production at the Point of Production" (Edwards, 1978) is a particularly good example of this: "Outside the firm...the 'equality' of market relations prevails. Inside the firm, relations between capitalists and workers take the form of boss and bossed; that is, a system of control prevails" p111. Littler and Salaman (1982) connect the same analysis to their argument about the need for the employer to control workers in order to extract labour from their labour power: "...the interior of the firm cannot be reduced to a bundle of exchange relations. Market models or notions of contract are inadequate conceptually to grasp the relations of subordination and domination governing the labour process" (p252).

(b) Work and the Containment of Conflict

There are other versions of this argument, however, in which the need for managerial control or domination is set in a context of inherently conflicting interests. In Edwards' analysis, for example, this conflict is inherent in the existence of the employer's goal of profitability - yet, ironically, it is not this goal itself which structures the organisation of work, but the need to repress the conflict somehow associated with it: "(Employers') goal remains profits; their strategies aim at establishing structures of control at work. That is, capitalists have attempted to organise production in such a way as to minimise workers' opportunities for resistance... Work has been organised, then, to contain conflict" (my emphasis) (Edwards, 1979, p16).

In many ways this argument sums up the difference of perspective between the analysis we have been considering, based on a notion of "control", and the position advanced in this thesis in which both the roots of conflict at work and the structure of the labour process itself obtain their nature and rationale from the overriding objective of profitability. Thus it is the mechanics of making a profit in terms of the exploitation of labour which engender conflict both over pay and over the structuring of the labour process itself towards ever-intensifying levels of exploitation or intensification of labour. In Edwards' argument we get a tantalising gesture in the direction of connecting conflict with profitability, only to find our way diverted by a detour in which the conflict itself is undefined and the labour process is structured not towards profitability but towards suppressing this unexplained "conflict".

Clearly Edwards' argument is not really as unconnected as this, and some of the assumptions inherent in it are clarified in an argument

along similar lines by Stephen Hill, (Hill, 1981). Hill introduces his book on Competition and Control at Work by linking the need for control at work with the "competition" (by which he means objective rather than overt conflict) of economic interests of the parties in employment. Since these differences of interest are a "structural characteristic of economic organisation" it follows that control will be necessary for one party to enforce the co-operation of the other.

We have already referred to this argument on pp 5-7; again, it links back to the lack of "interest" of the worker in providing useful labour. This clash of interests, this lack of "anything in it for me" as far as the worker is concerned, is held to indicate the need for compulsion and control in management-worker relations.

An analysis which refers to a clash between class interests is certainly, from our point of view, getting closer to the nub of what accounts for worker conflict within the labour process than one which simply asserts "relations of subordination and domination" per se. However, the route whereby this argument locates the clash of interests at the level of, as it were, "property relations" or the capital-labour relation itself, is one which we cannot follow. In our view conflict is located at a much lower, more concrete level of the expression of exploitation within the labour process. The question we really have to ask is how this difference of interest actually manifests itself within the labour process - and this, we would submit, is not in terms of "authority relations" (reference to which merely begs the question) or the explicit recognition of unequal property relations, but in terms of the "surfacing" of structural contradictions embodied in the relations of exploitation and extraction of surplus value inherent in the capitalist labour

process. Thus "control" relations become necessary because of the existence and working out of these contradictions, not because of their transparency at the level of the employment relationship.

(c) Keeping the Relations of Production Going.

A less common argument about control and domination within the labour process is one which assumes an ongoing "class struggle" at work in which both combatants are presented as having roughly equal power. Thus for example both Stark (1978) and Friedman (1978) criticise theories which assume the domination of capitalism in the development of the labour process, on the grounds that worker resistance has played an integral role in that development. We have already (in Chapter 1) considered a similar argument by Flger (1979) in the context of deskilling. Again, what is questioned here is not that antagonistic relations are embodied in the trajectory of development of the labour process, but the assumed basis of these antagonistic relations. According to the Brighton Labour Process Group, who share this perspective of an active and ongoing "class struggle" at the heart of the labour process, the focus of this struggle is the very relations of production themselves: "...this relation of capital to labour is not a static one, but is constantly reproduced in new conditions. It is a site of constantly renewed class struggle"(BLPG, 1977, 11) The article goes on to approvingly cite the arguments of one A.D. Magaline, who writes that "In the capitalist mode of production the principal site of the reproduction of the relations of production is the class struggle in production...which is expressed in the continual upheaval in the technical and social organisation of the labour process, ie in the continual revolutionising of the forces of production" (p11).

The very relations of production themselves, then, according to this view, are constantly being challenged by workers and thus require continual "reproduction" within the fabric of the labour process. The development of the forces of production, also, is attributed to the attempt by the bourgeoisie to keep the upper hand within this process of upheaval and defiance of their rule.

An interesting version of the same argument is posed by David Gordon in his consideration of "Capitalist Efficiency and Socialist Efficiency" (Gordon, 1976). As we discuss in more detail below, Gordon uses precisely opposite criteria in his characterisation of capitalist as distinct from socialist efficiency from those used in the present thesis. Thus for Gordon "production processes embody capitalist efficiency if they best reproduce capitalist control over the production process and minimise proletarian resistance to that control" (Gordon, 1976, 26). Elsewhere he has noted that "this definition of the qualitative aspect of efficiency embodies what Braverman, Marglin (1976) and others call 'Control' " (p36). In contrast (see below) it is central to our own argument that capitalist efficiency is defined as essentially quantitative. Leaving this aspect of the argument aside, however, we note here that Gordon bases his definition of capitalist efficiency as "qualitative" on an explicit assertion of the need for capitalism to continually reproduce its own relations of production: "In any class society, a mode of production can continue to dominate if and only if prevalent production processes reproduce the class relations defined by (the logic of) that mode of production" (p22).

The whole mode of operation of the capitalist labour process is thus defined in exclusively political terms relating to the maintenance of the overall system rather than in terms of production of

value and the pressures surrounding this. While, as we have noted above, Gordon is not alone in this outlook, the premisses on which it rests should perhaps be examined more fully. These are firstly that a given mode of production actually needs to have its relations continually and painfully "reproduced"; and secondly that this process of reproduction takes place at every level including the level of production. Thus, for example, a little further on in Gordon's argument "class struggle" is assumed to take place within production as a countervailing force to "competition" and the relation between the two to be subject to the same dialectic as that mediating the relation between quantitative and qualitative efficiency. Here "class struggle" is evidently understood as a struggle against the relations of political dominance embodied in Gordon's notion of "qualitative efficiency". In this way any conception of struggle over the imperatives of quantitative efficiency is overlooked.

I would argue, in contrast, that capitalist relations of production are, to a significant extent, self-sustaining in their overall structure and that conscious efforts to reinforce or reproduce them are made at the ideological level through currents which permeate society as a whole rather than being the focus of specific concrete struggles at the point of production. It is misleading to see the capitalist labour process as the site of this "reproduction", which is not its purpose. To present the labour process as exclusively or primarily a context for explicit ideological or political struggle is to divert attention from the central issues fundamental to the functioning and purpose of the capitalist labour process, those surrounding the creation of surplus value at the point of production itself.



The Emphasis on Use-Values: An Ahistorical View of the Labour Process

We now pass on to the central issue in this argument, the underlying view of the labour process by writers in the field, which has allowed the "control" perspective its unquestioned centrality. The argument will be approached through first discussing an as yet unconsidered strand of the "control" perspective, that emphasising the use-value aspects of the labour process. Through exploring the implications in this analysis we go on to present an alternative perspective in which structures specific to the capitalist labour process are shown to ordain the kind of work patterns which have either been attributed to managerial "domination" or mistakenly excluded from consideration of the labour process altogether.

Although Littler and Salaman, for example, have presented an argument in which control issues are considered largely in the context of work content in a qualitative sense, the most detailed exploration of use-value aspects of the labour process has been undertaken by Cressey and MacInnes in two recent papers, (1977, 1980). Here they explore firstly what is seen as the central contradiction between the need for capitalists to elicit the co-operation of workers and the antagonism inherent in the capital-labour relation, and secondly what they describe as the "structure of control" which is argued to embrace managerial decision-making at both corporate and plant level, and also to raise the possibility of labour extending its control beyond the plant to levels such as investment planning.

In both of these approaches the key point being made by Cressey and MacInnes is that technical use-value aspects of the labour process are not "neutral". Rather, such aspects both demonstrate contradictions which are inherent in the surrounding context of capitalist social relations, and are themselves crucially distorted by those

relations. Thus in criticising the false distinction said to have been made between the "technologico-material process of production" and "the social relations surrounding production" they argue that "it is that very process of production itself which is directly social and has to be analysed as such " (1977, 283). This argument is extended to examine the influence of the "social aspect" of production on the shape taken by material/technical factors within the labour process itself in the sense that while "It is exactly for this (to 'control' nature) that labour power is purchased at all... yet because it is so purchased, from the social aspect it appears that within the process of production it is purely the object, not subject, of control " (1977, 287).

What Cressey and MacInnes seem to be arguing here is that superimposed on to a "natural" labour process, ie the production of use-values, are "social relations" which impose particular kinds of oppressive and contradictory controls on labour. The same "social" distortion of a "natural" labour process is also implied in the associated contradiction within capitalist production which Cressey and MacInnes regard as central, that between management's need for worker co-operation and the oppressive controls which capitalism imposes on labour.

The authors have earlier cited Marx's dictum that "the work is not done twice over, once to produce...a use-value...and a second time to generate value..." (1977, 287) to support their argument as to the structuring of work organisation by these social factors. Unfortunately their analogy fails on the very point of how the operation of a specifically capitalist labour process is to be understood. Thus while Marx's whole argument is imbued by reference to the central objective of the labour process under capitalism of creating value,

Cressey and MacInnes' argument is silent on this point, substituting only the toothless constraint of "control". As in the arguments we examined earlier, "social relations" or relationships, with all their overtones of oppression, domination etc, have been substituted for the concept of "production relations" which pinpoints the nature of value creation within a particular mode of production. An analysis such as this can help us only to appreciate the qualitative, and not the crucial quantitative, pressures at work within the capitalist labour process.

A second point central to Cressey and MacInnes' argument also indicates the specific view of the labour process, common to many writers, which we shall outline below. This is the argument that it is not in fact "naturally" more efficient to have hierarchies, differentiation of function, separation of conception and execution, etc, operating within production. In this way the potential for more democratic forms of "labour control", such as workers' alternative plans, intervention in investment planning etc. is invoked within the present organisation of production.

While we can agree with Cressey and MacInnes on the objective inefficiency of rigid hierarchies and divisions of function within production (and, in our case at least, disagree on the ability of capitalism to embrace the forms of "labour control" listed) neither of these is, for the moment at least, the point. The point is instead that the omission of any analysis in terms of value makes the forms of control cited by Cressey and MacInnes inexplicable in their own right. There appears to be no explanation as to why workers should be pushed into rigidly structured, fragmented, "deskilled" methods of working apart from the wish by capitalists to dominate and control the workforce. Correspondingly, worker resistance is seen as a response purely

against that oppression and domination and towards their own control of the content of work; and even more significantly, no real reason exists as to why these antagonisms within the production process should not be co-operatively overcome. Thus a large part of Cressey and MacInnes' position is that labour has a creative potential which not only needs to be harnessed by management but can also provide the basis for initiatives by workers in the areas of investment planning, etc., referred to above.

In fact both the emphasis on the use-value-related or "creative" and potentially "co-operative" aspects of the labour process (along with the illusion that these can be successfully integrated into capitalist production) and the simultaneous exclusive concentration on political elements of domination and oppression, spring from the same source - a profoundly ahistorical conception of the labour process. The "labour process" is seen as a nature-converting function independent of any specific mode of production (thus the argument that the purpose of purchasing labour power is to "control" nature ignores the fact that labour has always been "controlled" even in modes of production which do not involve the purchase of labour power), on to which are superimposed the elements of domination and oppression which, for writers like Cressey and MacInnes, apparently define capitalism. Such a conceptualisation of the system is essentially moralistic and cannot help us to gain a real understanding of the system's mode of operation.

An important example of this can be found in Cressey and MacInnes' assertion that the forms of organisation of production, or what they term "control", under capitalism, are not "naturally" more efficient. While this is of course correct, it misses the point that this is the way capitalism, by definition, operates. Such

forms may not be "good", but they are intrinsic to the meaning of efficiency under capitalism. Structures such as division of labour, fragmentation and specialisation of labour, separation of conception and execution and even hierarchy of authority (though to a lesser extent) are imposed by employers primarily in order to increase the productivity of labour, to reduce time spent on production, not because such forms are seen as politically desirable. The whole logic of capitalist production is quantitative, one in which the extraction of the maximum amount of value in the minimum time is the driving force; it is this which sustains the system. Thus most of the elements of "control" focussed on by labour process writers are in fact methods directed at reducing labour time. Time is an issue almost totally ignored in the literature, yet one which is of crucial importance (it will be considered in depth in the next chapters).

#### Profitability and Efficiency as they Structure "Control"

What is at issue in analysis of the capitalist labour process, then, is not what is morally right and progressive, or what is to be morally condemned as arbitrarily getting in the way of the operation of a "pure" labour process, but the way in which the requirements of the capitalist mode of production structure the methods of production itself. In contrast to some of the position outlined above, therefore, we wish to put the following arguments:

- (i) Profitability structures the patterns of "control" (rather than control being a condition of profitability)
- (ii) There is a specifically capitalist logic and meaning of efficiency which is not primarily to be understood in terms of authority relations.

(i) Profitability and the Patterns of Control

We have already listed just above some of the examples of managerial patterns of work organisation which are often grouped under the term "control" - detail labour, command hierarchies, etc. Though few authors provide a list of what counts as "control" at work, Storey is an exception - in Managerial Prerogative and the Question of Control (Storey, 1983), he provides a whole series of examples, ranging from changing shop steward status through the Ford disciplinary code (applied to workers who fail to work normally) to the British Steel "rescue plan" which involved new working practices, elimination of overmanning, and intensified working arrangements. Some of these examples usefully raise the issue of "industrial relations", which we attempt to locate within the "control" perspective below. Others are examples of the kind of intensification of labour strategies which we have already described as serving more fundamental needs of capitalism than "control". Storey, in common with many other writers, projects an objective for management of "control" per se. However, some writers have gone further than this in drawing a connection between control and profitability, and it is these arguments we wish to examine.

Littler and Salaman, to take our first example, are almost aggressive in their insistence that "Capitalists are not, after all, despite the insistence of some recent authors, interested in control per se."

They go on to say that, "The first priority of capitalism is accumulation, not control. Control only becomes a concern when profitability is threatened" (Littler and Salaman, 1982, 265).

Unfortunately this argument seems to be used as a basis for saying, not that "control" issues are a subsidiary element in the management of the labour process, but that the labour process itself is of less

importance in pursuing profitability than are activities "away from the point of production" altogether. (We have discussed this argument more fully above, Chapter 1). Once again, the labour process is "control"; if we dismiss control issues, we dismiss the labour process. At the same time it is implied that a loss of control can "threaten" profitability.

Stephen Hill is more explicit in his presentation of control within the labour process as a condition of profitability. Arguing on the basis of the need for control posed by the fundamental worker/management conflict of interests over the alienation of labour, Hill concludes that "Profitability within conventional capitalist and socialist economies appears to depend on depriving employees of their independence and ensuring their subordination (Hill, 1981, 13). Later, in the context of an argument (which we consider in more detail below) about the possible embodying of "control" issues within the development of new technology, he comments that managerial values "embody a central feature of conventional capitalist production, that control is one condition of profitability " (1981, 122).

It is important to note, of course, that for Hill this is only "one condition", but nevertheless the direction of the relationship between control and profitability (and indeed, whatever the other "conditions" of profitability are supposed to be) remains clear. Reminiscent of the Steedman argument on the labour theory of value (see Chapter 3), "profitability" is only allowed to emerge, as it were, from the production process after certain limiting conditions (which, in Steedman's case, include the weather) have been overcome. The role of the overall objective of profitability in structuring the nature of the labour process, and the parallel defining feature of labour within capitalism of producing greater than its own value, are overlooked.

In contrast we maintain that the patterns of work organisation within the capitalist labour process, such as assembly-line or conveyor-belt flows of production, detailed systems of work measurement, and standardised working methods, are actually constructed by the requirements of capitalism rather than being "control techniques" devised in order to subdue worker resistance and thus in some convoluted way permit profitability. The task of making a profit is, indeed, far too crucial to be left to such roundabout methods - or at least this is true of late capitalism with the real subordination of labour. It has to be guaranteed right in the heart of the labour process through techniques which are geared unremittingly towards the maximum intensification of labour.

#### "Bureaucratic control" and the place of Industrial Relations

However, the associated argument that worker resistance is confronted by management as a constraint on profitability must be considered. It is no part of the present argument to attempt to downplay the role of worker resistance. What we would wish to focus on, as we have reiterated throughout, is what the resistance is about. If this can be understood, then so can the role of "control".

In fact we would argue that issues which have traditionally been placed under the heading of "industrial relations" are central to the management of the labour process, rather than as has commonly been supposed a separate category. Once again, unwillingness to allow anything but authority relations and questions of job content into the analysis of the labour process has allowed a curious reversal in which what are in fact managerial strategies directed towards issues surrounding the terms of conditions of employment are gathered under the rubric of "control" in the sense of authority. As we have argued above, John Storey's wide-ranging list of "control"



issues, in a theoretical context in which "control" clearly means authority relations, is an example of this. So is the concept of "bureaucratic control". How, then, can we relate worker resistance within our own argument to the patterns of work organisation cited above as being ordained by the drive towards intensification of labour?

As we noted in Chapter 1, there has been a curious omission from the accounts of worker resistance within the "labour process debate" of the struggles around piecework norms, overtime and other pay issues which in fact are an everyday challenge to management within the capitalist labour process. Alongside this silence, there has been a similar reluctance to explore the processes involved in workers' own grassroots forms of organisation around these issues, eg the significance of shop steward representation. Such areas are normally assumed to fall outside the province of the "labour process debate" and to belong, as we have said, to the sphere of "industrial relations".

However, to relegate issues surrounding the terms and conditions of employment, such as pay, bonus, overtime, job evaluation and job grading, and aspects relating to employment levels and employment security itself, to a sphere separate from the labour process is to ignore the centrality to it. Conflict over such issues permeates the labour process (far more so, in practice, than conflicts over job content, worker autonomy or managerial domination) and it is the organisation of workers around them which concretises the capital-labour antagonism into real bastions of organised resistance constituting an obstacle to the smooth implementation of managerial objectives in the labour process. Both these aspects of everyday "reality" within the labour process arise from the existence of basic contradictions within the value-producing process under capitalism, most notably exploitation, which no amount of "alternative forms of managerial

strategy" can prevent from intermittently surfacing.

Perhaps one reason why these areas of conflict have not received as much attention within the debate as their prevalence would seem to deserve is that issues which may be considered appropriate subjects for bargaining or negotiation are seen as "bureaucratic" and as not sufficiently revealing the social undercurrents which operate within the labour process. We have already tried to indicate the way in which such issues are the undercurrents - do provide the main focus for concern by workers in the most grassroots, informal way. However, it is perhaps significant that one of the few theoretical attempts to confront this topic within the labour process debate has been placed under the heading of "bureaucratic control".

In the 3rd part of his 3-stage analysis of control, Richard Edwards (Edwards, 1979) considers the employment strategies typically adopted by large corporations such as Polaroid. Here "incorporatist" elements such as preordained pay grading structures, agreed rules for promotion, job security and seniority, and beyond this an institutionalised and emasculated role for trade unions within the company, are emphasised by Edwards in terms of yet another, still more effective "control" strategy beyond the relatively unsophisticated means afforded by "technical control".

We have already indicated why we do not consider the above to be "control" issues in the "authority" sense normally implied in the use of the term. However, Edwards' implicit identification of exploitation-based issues with exactly this "authority"-centred dynamic allows the employer strategies which he groups under the term "bureaucratic control" to be regarded purely in terms of their role in suppressing worker resistance. In this way, as we have noted above, such strategies are located within a perspective of the labour process as "control"

in which the very work itself "has been organised...to contain conflict" (see p9). And further such strategies when taken to their bureaucratic extreme are seen as being potentially capable of resolving the whole problem of conflict at work: "...for a time bureaucratic control appeared to have resolved the whole problem of control - it was the first system without contradictions" (Edwards, 1978, 123).

What this argument fails to recognise is that the whole system referred to by the term "bureaucratic control" - one of sophisticated negotiating systems, agreed procedures, pre-planned and prescribed working methods and pay gradings - is one which is built on contradictions. "Bureaucratic control" represents an attempted accommodation and thus implicit recognition of the inherent antagonisms involved in exploitation. In this way the exigencies of profitability, through the relation of exploitation, once more can be seen to structure patterns of "control". The very worker organisation which corporate strategies set out to co-opt, arises and is sustained by precisely these contradictions at the heart of the capital-labour relation; and these contradictions in turn are embodied in the whole substance of the capitalist labour process as a profit-making activity.

In this sense the more sophisticated "industrial relations" procedures - indeed some of the more workaday ones as well - represent an implicit recognition that exploitation and its effects cannot be eliminated, and therefore some provision must be made for them. Conflict is thus to a certain extent "institutionalised", in the sense of acknowledging it as irreducible. In this way managerial strategies are not simply attempts at imposing authority but workable procedures aimed at extracting maximum profitability in the context of an acknowledged antagonism.

In the above we have argued firstly that issues surrounding "extrinsic" aspects of work such as pay must be regarded as part of the labour process in the sense that that process is centred on exploitation. We went on to argue that strategies developed to deal with the ensuing conflict and its organisation are not usefully defined as "control" strategies if these are understood in the sense of subordinating the workforce to managerial authority. Rather, the central requirement of profitability which defines the capitalist labour process ordains structures and procedures which have to be created in order to deal with the antagonisms inherent in operating that requirement. In this sense what "political" aspects of labour process relations which may be identified must be recognised as stemming from much more central and fundamental economic constraints.

(ii) The Capitalist Meaning of "Efficiency"

In the above we have attempted to show how specific patterns of work organisation under capitalism, for example tightly measured and atomised "time and motion" procedures, can be regarded as directly structured by the ongoing need for capitalism to reduce socially necessary labour time and thus increase profitability and competitiveness. In this concluding section we want to argue that this relates to a specific, quantitative meaning of efficiency under capitalism. The relation between this view and theories of "control" is usefully brought out in the article by David Gordon (Gordon, 1976) described earlier. We saw above (pl2) that for Gordon the efficiency of a production process under capitalism is actually defined in terms of its efficacy in reproducing the class relations of a mode of production - in other words in overwhelmingly political terms. Thus, for Gordon, while "In general, a production process is quantitatively (most) efficient if it effects the greatest possible useful physical output from a given set of physical inputs...In class societies, a production

is qualitatively efficient if it best reproduces the class relations of a mode of production " (1976, 22) .

This argument has two implications. The first is that all modes of production have sought the maximisation of output; that this is the "natural" or "real" meaning of efficiency. The second is that the identification of a class-specific notion of efficiency entails the integration of political aspects of the "reproduction" of what Gordon terms "ruling class dominance". Both of these implications run counter to the argument we are trying to develop here on capitalist "efficiency".

First of all, as we have tried to show, maximisation of output on the basis of a minimisation of input (socially necessary labour time), indeed precisely that quantitative aspect which identifies, is what <sup>Gordon</sup> is specific to capitalism as a market and commodity-producing economy. It is not a "natural", ongoing or ahistorical criterion of efficiency. It is true that in early transitional socialist societies encountering opposition and competition from capitalist states such quantitative elements have remained the criteria for productive efficiency, but, as Gordon himself argues later, such would not be the case in a fully-developed socialist economy, and it certainly would not appear to have been the case within subsistence economies such as feudalism. Thus far from specifically capitalist criteria of efficiency being definable in "qualitative" terms in Gordon's sense, it is the quantitative objectives of production which uniquely express the logic and requirements of capitalism. Qualitative efficiency is in fact the other side of the equation - the kind of "real" efficiency that could be gained through workers' full involvement in planning and organisation of production.

The point about a specifically capitalist meaning of efficiency is well illustrated in an example from the second case study presented

in this thesis (see Chapter 7). Here what was objectively an extremely inefficient lorry delivery service run by a private company was subjected to profit-oriented time-study criteria which reduced the schedules issued to drivers to what were in practice impracticably tight levels. The poor delivery record actually itself arose from the shortage of drivers which in its turn was encouraged by a payment system a large element of which was overtime. Both management and drivers preferred to keep staffing levels low, in the first case to save money, in the second to make it. The only "way out" the company could see from these contradictions was to tighten the screw on the drivers' delivery times to impossibly high levels. Thus the "efficiency" extolled in private industry under capitalism actually came down to extracting maximum levels of labour intensification from the workers, a strategy to which, given the structure of tight staffing combined with overtime imposed by the profitability/exploitation nexus, there was no real alternative.

#### Is "Control" Built into Technology?

We have tried to show in the above that under capitalism "efficiency" is not a matter of repression and domination, but of getting the most work possible out of the least working time. Not what, but how much; not how, but how quickly, have been the criteria of success within the capitalist labour process. In our concluding remarks we examine firstly why capitalism adopts what are "objectively" or "naturally" inefficient methods and secondly whether production technology is structured round the issue of "control" or simply faster output.

On the first issue, Cressey and MacInnes are of course correct in pointing out that "There is no...physical law...that proves that a sharp hierarchy, differentiation of function, and divorce and concentration in a few of the producers of conception, and direction as

opposed to execution, is, technically speaking, more 'efficient'." (1977, 287-8) However, as we have pointed out, their own analysis makes capitalist strategies inexplicable. We show in the case study chapters how managerial lack of interest in or awareness of what were in fact important aspects of worker knowledge (a managerial omission compounded by workers' own feelings that work organisation was "not our job") caused significant contradictions and holdups in the production process. Far from a situation of management eliciting worker co-operation, it was a case of management being unconcerned with worker behaviour or attitudes beyond the basic issue of "performance", and calculating and imposing production norms in which the last consideration was worker "creativity" or potential for more effectively organising the labour process. Such negligence (which of course has been modified recently with the introduction of techniques like quality circles) was not due to the kind of drives towards hierarchical authority implied in Cressey and MacInnes' analysis, but to the overwhelmingly quantitative criteria of efficiency in organising the labour process which dominated managerial thinking. Finally we turn to the meaning of "efficiency" as embodied in the development of new technology under capitalism. Given the quantitative logic which we have described as governing the organisation of the labour process, it can be assumed that the same desiderata of maximising productivity would apply to the development of new manufacturing techniques. However, two authors who consider this question have injected, again, a "control" element into the analysis of such development. Thus David Noble has devoted much of his work to showing how "the social relations of production shape the technology of production as much as the other way round" (Noble, 1979, 50) while Stephen Hill argues more tentatively that although profitability can be seen to be a fundamental element in the introduction of new production techniques, "What are important

are the internalised design values and unconscious assumptions about what constitutes 'progress' which managers and engineers bring to bear when they apply scientific and technical knowledge to industry " (Hill, 1981, 122). These values are said to focus on the salience of control as "a central feature of conventional capitalist production."

This argument of Hill's relates to his basic thesis that the clash of interests at the heart of the capital-labour relation requires inputs of managerial control at all levels to suppress resistance. At the same time, however, Hill recognises that while "One way of improving profitability is to create a production process which prevents the conflicts of interest in industry from hindering accumulation" nevertheless "this is by no means the only impetus towards new techniques " (Hill, 1981, 112). Yet again, Braverman is unjustly (in our view) alleged to "overestimate the extent to which control is in fact achieved through the design of new methods" (112) .

Despite the importance of "control" in his argument, then, Hill allows some recognition of other factors which may influence technological development, profitability apparently being chief among these. The argument of Noble, in contrast, is dedicated to showing that "control" objectives are embedded in the development of new production techniques, both as a motive for their actual instigation and in terms of a subsequent "monitoring" function at work.

The notion of a "choice" of technologies is central to Noble's thesis that the particular path of development of technology is shaped not by some independent driving-force within the technology itself, but by the social structure surrounding it. The example of the development of numerically-controlled machine tools is used to demonstrate this. In noting that the earlier prototype of "record-playback", which involved recording the craft skills of the operator in making the tape, was



abandoned in favour of a system using numerical codings representing each detail of the relevant work pattern, Noble argues that this choice is illustrative of the influence of social relations on technology in cutting out elements of worker discretion. Similarly, the decision indicates the "drive for total automation" which Noble identifies on the part of management, and the way in which this "ideology of engineering...mirrors the antagonistic social relations of capitalist production" (Noble, 1979, 30).

Noble is accurate in identifying a "drive for total automation" (1979, 30) as the force behind the development of new production techniques in late capitalism. What needs to be investigated is the rationale behind this "drive", which Noble appears to define once again in terms of authority relations: "There is no question but that management saw in N/C the potential to enhance their authority over production and seized on it, despite questionable cost-effectiveness" (1979, 34).

It is unquestionable that capitalists aim at total consistency, predictability and standardisation in the use of their labour-power. But whether such objectives are a matter of managerial authority aspirations is less clear. Labour which is machine-like - measured, target-oriented, sustainable over a long period - is clearly considerably more productive than human labour which is variable, intermittent, unable consistently to adhere to maximalist targets. The less human intervention (as in the case of "record-playback" versus N/C) the less interruption of a smooth, mechanised flow process. And indeed the very technology of numerically-controlled tapes, based on the minute dissection and numbering of elements of human labour, represents the quantitative rationale of capitalist production, which, rather than more ephemeral aspects of "authority" relations, is what is integrated into the design and operation of the machine.

## Conclusions

Thus while issues of "authority" are prevalent in the operation of the capitalist labour process in the sense that management (and the workforce) clearly see some areas, and not others, as their prerogative (cfr p27) we must be careful not to identify such "political" aspects of intergroup relations with an overriding rationale governing the overall operation of that process. In this chapter we have tried to show how the meaning of "control", a concept clearly central to the debate but as yet inadequately theorised, has been overwhelmingly, if at times implicitly, defined in terms of relations of domination and subordination within the labour process. These "relations" have in their turn been shown to be conceived as purely "social", ie unstructured by specific material aspects of the mode of production. In this sense the perspective on the labour process indicated in the use of the term "control" has been argued to be profoundly ahistorical; to have substituted for an analysis of the specifically capitalist process of production the image of a "pure" labour process involving in principle the "creative" production of use-values, on to which has been superimposed by the primarily political ordinances of capitalism a set of distorting relations of domination and subordination.

It is hoped that in this chapter, through the use of some concrete examples as well as argument, we have begun to establish the validity of an alternative conception which, literally, "revolutionises" these points of view on the labour process; turns them on their head by indicating that, insofar as the concept of "control" is useful at all, it can be understood as indicating patterns of work organisation which are structured by the requirement of profitability, not vice versa. This point of view is arrived at by regarding the labour process under capitalism primarily in terms of its overriding objective of valor-

isation which constructs the whole internal organisation of the labour process. It is to this issue of valorisation that we now turn.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Capitalist Labour Process

In the last chapter we were concerned to show that certain forms of the organisation of work, grouped under the title of "control" by labour process theorists, were in fact created and structured by the overall requirement of profitability of the capitalist mode of production. In going on to examine, in this chapter, the specific character of the capitalist labour process, we shall explore the operation of this requirement within the labour process itself through the use of the Marxist concept of valorisation. We shall then discuss how the related process of exploitation both constructs worker response and indicates a central link between the labour process and the overall capitalist mode of production. In the analysis of exploitation we emphasise the twin aspects of labour intensification and subsistence.

#### Valorisation

This concept will be made central to the analysis of the specifically capitalist labour process for two reasons. Firstly, because it pinpoints an area of Marx's writings on the labour process (mainly in the section of Capital Volume 1 (Marx, 1976) entitled "Results of the Immediate Process of Production") which appear to have been unjustly neglected by labour process theorists. This would, of course, be insufficient justification without the second reason, which is that the concept and its accompanying analysis locate structures and processes which continue to decisively influence the day-to-day operations of the labour process within modern manufacturing concerns. Considering the concept of "valorisation" will, we hope, enable us to bring into sharper focus the relationships between profitability and "control" strategies which we attempted to outline in the last chapter.

Marx's theory of valorisation breaks down into four areas:

- i) The "simple" explanation as to the expansion of value within the labour process;
- ii) The unity of labour process and valorisation process in the capitalist mode of production;
- iii) The role of labour in its interrelation with capital (the crucial "reversal" thesis);
- iv) The location of profit generation within the sphere of production rather than circulation.

We shall discuss these aspects of the analysis one by one, during which we hope their relevance will become clear.

i) Expansion of Value

We have called this argument "simple", but in fact it contains within itself the whole definition of both "capital" and capitalism. Leaving this aside for a moment, however, we need to consider the basic meaning of the term "valorisation".

Valorisation is simply the expansion of a given quantity of value into a larger quantity, specifically in a context of capital and wage labour. Capital, in its most abstract form, is money (the ultimate logic of the quantitative logic of capitalism referred to in the last chapter) and the process of valorisation can be defined as that of increasing a given sum of money into a larger sum. However, money, as Marx points out, is only potentially capital, and it is only as capital that it can become part of the process of valorisation. In other words, money, or exchange value, is advanced within the capitalist process of production in order to create more money: "In itself this sum of money may only be defined as capital if it is employed, spent, with the aim of increasing it..." (p976).

However, the very form in which this process takes place, the apparently "pure" and abstract transformation of money into more money, disguises,

as Marx recognises, the how, the "real procedure by means of which  $x$  is changed into  $x+\Delta x$ " (p976). The essential element is, of course, wage labour. The wage aspect of the labour is emphasised because it is crucial that a certain amount of the original sum of money has to be allocated to precisely this, ie the "means of labour". If not for the fact that a specified amount of value has to be set aside to purchase labour, or rather labour-power, it would be impossible for a surplus of value beyond this to be created and measured within the production process. But of course it is this surplus, which "is nothing but the production of surplus labour, the appropriation of unpaid labour in the course of the actual process of production" (p978), which is the additional increment of value involved in the valorisation process.

In this sense labour is central to the valorisation process, which in its turn is intrinsic to the whole definition of capital. Marx makes it clear that this integration of labour into valorisation takes place within a "real" production process rather than belonging, as the political economists of his day (as well as, perhaps, some of the labour process theorists of ours) assumed, to the sphere of circulation. It is this unity of the concrete process of production, or labour process, and the overall objective of valorisation, that we now go on to consider.

## ii) Unity of Labour Process and Valorisation Process

As many labour process theorists have pointed out, Marx is clear that "The work is not done twice over, once to produce....a use-value...and a second time to generate value and surplus value, to valorise value" (p991). In other words, there is only one labour process, and that process is concrete and product-specific. Where the issue gains complexity is in the analysis of the "twofold form" of labour, and this at first returns us to the basic definition of "valorisation" contained in (i) above.

There it was pointed out that the surplus involved in valorisation is only quantifiable in relation to a specific proportion of the original value which is set aside to purchase labour power (ie "variable capital").

However, this still leaves open the question of exactly how extra value is generated by labour within the production process. The key element in the explanation of this is time, which as we saw in Chapter 2 is a crucial practical issue in considering organisation of and worker response to the labour process. In terms of the generation of value, what this means is that if the work, as Marx puts it (p992), "stops short" at the point at which the amount that has been produced is equivalent to the amount of (any) commodities that make up the worth of the wage, then no extra value, clearly, has been obtained from the worker. It is only when the labour process has been extended beyond the time in which the worker produces the wage-equivalent that extra value can be generated.

How, though, can an equivalence be drawn between a quantitative element such as time and the concrete, varied content of the worker's labour? The answer is to be found in just this quantitative aspect of the labour - in other words, as we noted in Chapter 2, not what the worker is making, but how much - not how, but how quickly. We see below that the development of the labour process under capitalism has incorporated a change from the extension of the working day (absolute surplus value) to the intensification of labour within the working day (relative surplus value) as strategies for the maximisation of this surplus. But either way the labour is judged in terms of whatever socially necessary, or socially average, amount is needed to create a surplus at a given level of technical development. Thus the concrete labour invested in the labour process is judged as a quantity of socially necessary labour, which in turn transforms the labour process into a valorisation process insofar as that quantity represents "an excess over the amount contained in wages" (p992).

The calculation of surplus value in terms of an amount (measured as time x output) of undifferentiated, quantifiable labour allows us to understand the crucial abstract dimension in the twofold character of labour. We will be saying more about abstract labour later, as we will about the issue of its intensity in the discussion of "real subordination of labour". What Marx labels "socially necessary" or "socially average" labour is clearly what he refers to elsewhere as abstract labour, and is the aspect which he contrasts with "concrete labour in the use-values of the commodity" (p992) in his description of labour's dual form.

But how can the same labour have two different aspects - the concrete, use-value-creating form and the undifferentiated form in which it can be calculated solely in terms of value? The crucial point here is that the domination of the useful labour process by the objective of valorisation, the overriding purpose of the process as a whole of the production of value, conditions the purpose, meaning and treatment of useful labour. Marx sees this distinction between useful and valorising labour as arising within the labour process itself: "It is no longer we who make it; instead it is created in the process of production itself" (p993). Here Marx refers to the relation between objectified (use-value) labour and objectifying (valorising) labour within the labour process. The existing use-values used as means of production, materials etc. can only increase their value by the addition of living labour within the activity of the labour process, so that this living labour is both considered as value-creating activity and is itself measured in terms of value, ie money.

On the one hand, then, Marx emphasises the purpose and result of capitalist production as defining the process: "The production of surplus value...appears therefore as the determining purpose, the driving force and the final result of the capitalist process of production, as the means



through which the original value is transformed into capital" (p976). On the other, he shows more practically how this overriding purpose actually reverses the relationships pertaining in the "natural" labour process. It is this reversal which we go on to consider in looking at the third aspect of valorisation.

### iii) Interrelation of Labour and Capital

Marx refers at several points in his argument to the notion of capital as "absorbing" or "sucking in" living labour, and indeed this metaphor seems to express the essence of the process of valorisation. We shall see in a moment how this "absorption" function creates a relationship in which the worker, rather than employing the means of production, is as it were employed by them - the well-known concept of the worker as the "tool of the machine", but expressed in this analysis more fully as part of the whole transforming role of production relations as such.

First of all, however, it is important to understand the nature of the interrelation between capital and labour, which, despite the apparently passive nature of labour's "absorption" assumes in Marx's analysis a highly active form. The "living labour" which is "sucked in" to the means of production during the combined labour and valorisation process is seen as playing almost a fermenting role in activating "dead labour": "By incorporating living labour-power into the material constituents of capital, the latter becomes an animated monster and it starts to act 'as if consumed by love' " (p1007). Marx makes the same point at the end of Part 1 of Chapter 7 on the labour process: "The labour process is a process between things the capitalist has purchased, things which belong to him. Thus the product of this process belongs to him just as much as the wine which is the product of the process of fermentation going on his cellar " (Marx, 1976, p292).

There is thus, in principle, a symbiotic interrelationship between capital and labour - a "creative" interconnection which belies the notion, considered below (p30) that the labour theory of value can be understood in terms of static portions of "embodied labour time". As the twin aspect to the "absorbing", "devouring" role of capital in relation to labour (which Marx colourfully illustrates with his description of "the means of production" as "no more than leeches drawing off as large an amount of living labour as they can" - p988) there is also the positive, almost literally "life-giving" potential of labour for creating value.

This positive, creative aspect of labour is apparently drawn attention to in Cressey and MacInnes' argument as described in Chapter 2 (p15). However, for these authors the creative aspect of labour is seen entirely in terms of its function in the production of use-values. The valorisation aspect, which is what here defines the creativity of labour for Marx, is ignored. Similarly, the description of the activity of labour in the valorisation process sheds a different light on another issue taken up by labour process writers; the transformation of labour-power into labour. In the argument we have just examined, the creation of value by labour, rather than being a process which is itself problematical, is again part of the definition of the production process under capitalism.

Of course, to cite the Marxist argument itself is to beg the question as to whether aspects of worker response do not in fact interfere with this very process of valorisation. Marx's conception of the "real subordination of labour", itself an expression of the logic of the valorisation objective, has both been criticised for refusing to deal with the issue of worker resistance and inaccurately described as relating solely to issues of power and domination in the labour process. This question will be dealt with further below. For the moment, it is important to make the point that while labour in its relation to capital is "creative" in the sense that

it expands value, which presupposes that some level of surplus value will be generated, this "creativity" is not a free capacity, but is subordinated to and defined by the demands of valorisation: "The worker treats the hide he is tanning simply as the object of his creative activity...If we consider production just as a labour process, the worker consumes the means of production as the mere means of subsistence of labour. But production is also a process of valorisation, and here the capitalist devours the labour-power of the worker, or appropriates his living labour as the life-blood of capitalism " (p1007).

So the objective of valorisation as it were commands the labour of the worker, provides an overriding imperative which overwhelms the subjective, use-value-creating aspect of the labour process. In this way the "absorbing" or "devouring" role of capital in relation to labour assumes an almost concrete presence in confronting the worker as an objectified structure which reverses the "logical" relationship between a worker and his or her means of labour. This, of course, is not some theoretical process but a real situation in which the means of production confront labour not only "in the context of the capitalist process of valorisation in general (in the role of the means of production as devourers of living labour)" but also "in the development of the specifically capitalist mode of production (in which machinery, etc., becomes the real master of living labour)." (p983)

In other words, the overall objective of valorisation comes to be expressed in the form of advanced machinery and technology, and this is the logic of the "real subordination of labour" which we discuss below. Finally, however, we need to define the dynamic behind this reversal in which the means of production render the worker their object. Once again, we find a strange parallel here between the political economists criticised by Marx, and modern theorists of the labour process, in that

both fasten on a specific agent to explain this objectification. For the political economists, the means of production are capital; the things actually used in the process of production take on the properties of what is actually a social relation, and "act" as capital. In other words, capital is fetishised in these assumptions.

For labour process theorists, on the other hand, the subordination of workers to the means of production is caused by the politically or ideologically-inspired wish of capitalists to dominate the workforce. This view, and its implications, have been well documented above (Chapter 2). The crucial argument of Marx which can be used in rebuttal of either of these views is that it is the relations of production of capitalism, the relation between capital and wage-labour in which production is based on surplus value, which brings about the transformation of labour from subject to object. Rather than the means of production "themselves" taking on the power to draw labour from the worker, or capitalists in person directly imposing their drive for domination on the workforce, it is the relation between the means of production and the worker which have undergone a transformation, or reversal, with the onset of commodity production.

It is precisely this reversal, and the economic relationships which construct it, to which we tried to draw attention in the argument that the requirement of profitability structures "control" rather than vice versa, and it is this analysis which makes the concept of valorisation so important for an understanding of the capitalist labour process.

#### iv) Surplus Value is produced within the Labour Process

The final area of the valorisation argument is in some ways the most fundamental. Starting again with the impact of the overall purpose of valorisation on the structure and organisation of the labour process ("Since the labour process is only the instrument and actual form of

the valorisation process, ie since its purpose is to employ the labour materialised in wages...to create surplus-value..." p1009) Marx goes on to state that "the crux of the entire process is the exchange of objectified labour for living labour, of less objectified labour for more living labour" (p1009).

There are two points here: firstly that this exchange of "less" for "more", ie the value represented in the worker's wages and means of production for an extra amount of value beyond this supplied by the worker's labour, is the process of creating surplus value; and secondly that this exchange, this process, takes place within the labour process.

Capitalists, workers, political economists alike, Marx argues - all those who "fetishise" capital - are unable to understand the nature of this exchange, because to them it appears that the labour, once "bought", is simply another form of capital, a value-creating substance added to the value already seen as "naturally" embodied as capital in the means of production. In other words it is assumed that a certain quantity of labour is bought outside the labour process, in the sphere of circulation through the payment of wages, and that no further exchange of more value for less takes place within the process of production itself. In this way "the exchange process that takes place between variable capital and labour power" outside the labour process, is identified with "the process in which living labour finds itself sucked up and absorbed by constant capital " (p1009).

Thus the same fetishisation which treats useful labour purely as value-creating substance, because of the overriding requirement of profitability, is that which fails to understand the actual productive process in which the quantity of use-values represented in the worker's wage is exceeded by the quantity of use-values produced within the working day through the

extension of unpaid beyond paid labour time. The specificity of the capitalist labour process is lost in a perspective which assumes that "capital" is embodied in the physical means of production of any labour process (just as, in the emphasis by labour process theorists purely on the use-value-creating function of labour, all labour processes are subsumed under an ahistorical category of simply "making things").

In fact the specificity of capitalism lies in its requirement of surplus value, and the generation of this within the labour process, and the recognition of this has two important implications. The first, as we have suggested, is fundamental for the whole understanding of capitalism as a mode of production; put very briefly, it is that capitalism is predicated on the existence of wage labour. If not for the payment of a wage, there would be no surplus. More to the point for our own analysis, this means that the capitalist labour process is based on exploitation, a relationship of which Marx's political economists were not aware (understanding, as they did, labour within the labour process simply as a resource unrelated to the price paid for labour power) and which it would appear from the writings of many of today's labour process theorists that they prefer to ignore. We shall discuss exploitation, and its relation in this respect to subsistence issues within the labour process, in more detail at a later stage in this paper.

The second point is again more directly related to discussion of the labour process as such. It is that if we accept the point that value is created within the capitalist labour process, and that the labour process under capitalism is organised as a value-creating process, then issues relating to the reduction of socially necessary labour time, the intensification of labour and ultimately the "abstraction" of labour become central to our considerations. It is these issues which we go on to explore in looking at Marx's theory of the "Real Subordination of Labour".

### Real Subordination of Labour - Mechanisation and Abstraction

RSL, as we shall now term it, is considered here partly as bringing out the logic of Marx's theory of valorisation in the context of the development of the labour process, and partly in order to further define the issues of intensification of labour, etc., referred to above. It also serves, however, to locate some significant differences in emphasis and approach between Marx and current labour process theorists. This section will therefore be divided into three areas: Recent theoretical responses to the concept of RSL; the theory itself in the context of Marx's overall analysis of the labour process; and finally and most importantly the way in which the RSL manifests itself within today's labour process.

#### (i) RSL within the labour process debate.

The response of many present-day theorists to the notion of the RSL is that it somehow eliminates worker resistance and should be criticised for this. For example, Littler and Salaman argue that "In general it is difficult to avoid the conclusions of Friedman and Cressey and MacInnes that the FSL (formal subordination of labour)/RSL distinction constitutes an inadequate theorization of the relation between capital and labour at the point of production" and they note sympathetically that "Friedman in fact suggests discarding the...distinction altogether if it is going to lead people away from dealing with class relations and class struggle within modern capitalism" (L&S, 1982, p253).

If this is an attack on the whole viability of the theory of RSL, the "defence" (which in fact precedes most of these criticisms) takes place, paradoxically, along almost the same lines. Thus the Brighton Labour Process Group, in a 1977 paper which aims to theorise the specifically capitalist labour process, begins its analysis of RSL with the rousing phrases: "Capital must create capitalist labour process. It must have power in the very heart of production itself so that it can have a solid material basis

for its overriding objective: Valorisation in command!" (BPLG, 1977, p9). Similarly, having described the way in which machinery allows "capital to break through the limits represented by the speed with which labour could perform these functions" (p12), the writers go on to refer to this as the "real power of control" of capital and ask how this "power" is used to achieve valorisation, answering their own question with the statement that "The collective worker of machinofacture allows the imposition of the authority of capital " (p12). The section concludes, indeed emphasises, that: "....the capitalist labour process is that specific form of the collective worker based on machinofacture in which capital, having a monopoly of knowledge and power over the relations between labour and the means of production, uses this power, this real domination, in order to enforce the objective of valorisation " (BPLG, 1977, p13).

In this way, rather than RSL being understood as in itself the vehicle or structure of valorisation, it is seen in terms of a relationship of "power" which is used to "enforce" valorisation. This is a crucial shift of emphasis from the Marxist perspective, and is of course echoed in the later criticisms of the concept, the authors of which see RSL (which is in fact translated as real subsumption of labour in the Mandel edition of Capital) in exactly those terms of relations of power and domination with which they are themselves preoccupied, and thus as invoking an implausibly total picture of the purposive domination of capital over labour.

#### (ii) Marx's Theory of RSL

Interestingly, Marx himself explicitly rejects interpretations of the initial "takeover" of the labour process by capital put in terms of political domination: "Subordination in this case (appropriation of surplus labour) arises from the specific content of the sale - there is not a subordination underlying it...determined not just by money...but, let us say, by political constraints...There is no fixed political and social



relationship of supremacy and subordination " (p1025).

What, then, constitutes the real subordination (or real subsumption) of labour for Marx? As might be imagined from the foregoing, the concept of valorisation is crucial in articulating the argument. Real subordination of labour is the expression of the way the capitalist labour process has developed in order to fulfill more adequately the prevailing objective of valorisation.

The development of real from formal subordination of labour under capitalism is predicated on two related conditions: a level of mass production sufficient to operate capitalism on a social rather than individual scale, and the transition from absolute to relative surplus value, ie from the maximisation of surplus labour based only on an extension of labour time to one based on the more intensive or productive use of labour time. Both these features are related by Marx to specifically capitalist forms of production: "The enlargement of scale constitutes the real foundation on which the specifically capitalist mode of production can arise...." (p1022) and "With the production of relative surplus value the entire real form of production is altered and a specifically capitalist form of production comes into being (at the technological level too) " (p1024). Within this development of techniques for relative increases in surplus value, essentially based on the continual, competition-inspired, drive to reduce socially necessary labour time, all the mechanical, technological and eventually organisational techniques for the intensification of labour gathered under the title "real subordination of labour" come into their own.

Thus while the initial takeover by capitalism of the existing labour process applied in production brings about no instant, dramatic change in the concrete form of that labour process, the transformation in

relations of production located in that takeover carries with it a logic the ultimate result of which is that "With the real subsumption of labour under capitalism a complete...revolution takes place in the mode of production, in the productivity of workers and in the relations between workers and capitalists." (p1035)

What brings this about? The point is that all the tendencies for real subordination lie within the transformed relations of production which frame the formal subordination of labour. It is not that some natural property of "capital" imposes itself on labour, changing its content, but that the priority under capitalism of the extraction of surplus value operates to develop these tendencies towards a system of production adequate for the objective of maximisation of surplus value. The tendencies involved here are those of accumulation with its accompanying increase in the scale of production, competition which forces the reduction of socially necessary labour time, the development of the forces of production (machinery, technology) which interact with and ensue from both these tendencies. Thus we again have the drive towards valorisation as the catalyst for developments which have either been seen as inhering in the "natural" properties of "capital" or as ensuing from the otherwise unexplained desire of capitalists to dominate the labour process. As we have tried to explain, "real subordination" as expounded by Marx denotes neither of these but the way in which the relations of production under capitalism, centred on the production of surplus-value, develop in a direction which most fully expresses the requirements of this central function.

### (iii) Intensification and Abstraction of Labour under RSL

As we have seen, the transition to RSL is defined centrally in terms of the extraction of relative (as opposed to absolute) surplus value.

"Relative" is used in relation to time. Thus, in the extraction of absolute surplus value, the amount of value is the maximum that can be provided given the standard provision of labour within the limits set by the length of the

working day. The only way to increase the amount of value available to the capitalist at this stage was to increase the number of hours worked - a strategy with built-in limitations, even for Victorian taskmasters. As Marx expresses it, relative surplus-value "arises when the individual capitalist is spurred on to seize the initiative by the fact that value= the socially necessary labour-time objectified in the product and that therefore surplus-value is created for him as soon as the individual value of his product falls below its social value and can be sold accordingly at a price above its individual value." (p1023-4)

How can this "fall in value" of the product come about? By a reduction in the time taken by the worker to produce it. Thus the drive to reduce labour time, bringing with it an overall reduction in socially average or socially necessary labour time, becomes a central force operating within the capitalist labour process. It does not, of course, mean an easier life for the worker - though it does allow for an extension of leisure hours. What it does mean is an intensification of labour during the time spent at work - an immense increase in the relative potential of each hour spent at work for the production of value.

#### Mechanisation and Experience of the Labour Process

An important distinction between the labour process of Marx's day and that of the present is revealed in the fact that Marx saw what he termed "machinofacture" as the major vehicle of this overall reduction of labour time. The era of "scientific management", of detailed attention to and breaking down and measurement of workers' actual work patterns, had not yet dawned as Marx developed his theory of the real subordination of labour. Thus the development of machinery involved in large-scale production, while bringing about "objectively", as it were, a massive intensification of labour in terms of the reduction of labour time, was not a function of production aimed directly at systematising patterns of work organisation as such!

Leaving aside for the moment, then, the impact of techniques aimed directly at what might be called the "software" of the labour process on the experience of the worker, we can divide Marx's comments on the impact of RSL on workers' experience of the labour process into two areas:

a) The objectification of the means of production. This can be dealt with fairly briefly, as much has already been said above (p6ff), in discussing the interrelation between labour and capital, on this issue. However, it may be worth reminding ourselves of the link Marx draws between "the capitalist process of valorisation in general" and "the development of the specifically capitalist mode of production (in which machinery, etc., becomes the real master of living labour)" (p983) a link which anticipates the later argument on the real subordination of labour. In other words, the reversal of the producer means of production relationship ultimately assumes, on the basis of a scale of production which can directly apply "the sciences, of mechanics, chemistry etc., for specific ends, technology, etc." (p1024), a highly definite and material shape in the form of machinery which directly confronts the worker as the consumer of his or her labour.

The experience of the worker, then, in the face of widespread mechanisation, is one in which the organisation of the labour process, the labour process as object, has literally been taken out of her or his hands. The worker's labour is dominated by the objectified forms of capital. It thus becomes what can be argued to be, even in experiential terms, abstract labour.

b) The abstraction of labour. This immanence of abstract labour as an actual aspect of the organisation and experience of the labour process becomes, as we shall see below, even more pronounced at a later stage of capitalist development than that typified by mechanisation. Nevertheless, Marx's own description in the Grundrisse of the impact of mechanisation

on the worker express powerfully the abstraction of labour itself within this structure.

"In the machine...the use value, ie the material quality of the means of labour, is transformed into an existence adequate to...capital as such.... The worker's activity, reduced to a mere abstraction of activity, is determined and regulated on all sides by the movement of the machinery, and not the opposite...The production process has ceased to be a labour process in the sense of a process dominated by labour as its governing unity. Labour appears, rather, merely as a conscious organ, scattered among the individual living workers at numerous points of the mechanical system...." (Marx, 1973, p693).

Later in the same passage, Marx makes the point that "the production in enormous mass quantities which is posited with machinery destroys every connection of the product with the direct need of the producer, and hence with direct use value; it is already posited in the form of the product's production and in the relations in which it is produced that it is produced only as a conveyor of value, and its use value only as condition to that end " (Marx, 1973, p694).

In this way the position of labour viewed purely as value-creating, as abstract labour, is applied directly to the labour process itself. Marx makes clear the connections between the valorisation objective and the abstraction of labour in the Resultate: "Complete and total abstraction is made...from its particular utility, its particular nature and kind insofar as it is reckoned as value-forming element and the commodity is reckoned as its objectification" (Dragstedt, 1976, p94-5).

We now go on to examine the concept of abstract labour more closely as a possible aid in understanding today's labour process.

### Abstract Labour

The concept of abstract labour, particularly when applied directly to the labour process, has been viewed with suspicion by many writers who see it as negating the constructive content of labour. However, there have been some who have written in defence of this idea. Lucio Colletti, for example, has used it to make a link between the discussion of alienation in the early work of Marx and a materialist analysis of the capitalist mode of production based on valorisation. Thus he argues that "in the reality of the world of commodities...individual labour powers are equalised precisely because they are treated as abstract or separate from the real empirical individuals to whom they belong...'Abstract labour', in short, is alienated labour, labour estranged or separated with respect to man himself" (Colletti, 1969, p84).

Geoffrey Kay, a more recent writer some of whose criticisms of the notion of abstract labour we will be discussing further below, has also expanded on the concept on an earlier, less critical article. Agreeing with Marx that "The exploitation of labour by capital...is much more than the appropriation of surplus production through the free exchange of commodities. It is no less than the mode of production itself", (Kay, 1976, p4) Kay asserts of the process central to that mode, "The very process of value production is itself....the real process through which labour becomes abstract" (Kay, 1976, p1). Relating this "real process" to the capitalist labour process under machinofacture, Kay concludes, "...whereas in manufacturing the content and organisation of the labour process starts from the specific concrete capacities of the workforce, modern industry abstracts these capacities and starts from the technical imperatives of the machine".(Kay, 1976, p4)

In this way the same centrality of wage labour and exploitation to the capitalist mode of production which we pointed out above (p11) is used

to demonstrate the rationale of abstract labour for the capitalist labour process. As we shall see below, Braverman draws even more specific connections between the drive for profitability and the approximation towards abstract labour in the labour process of late capitalism.

Not all writers, however, are so sympathetic. Kay himself, in a later change of mind, feels forced to admit in the context of a spirited defence of the labour theory of value against Marx's major critic Bohn-Bawerk that "To posit abstract or general human labour is apparently... to advance an abstraction which has no more content than the category of general utility that Bohn-Bawerk's criticism implies." (Kay, 1980, p54)

For Kay, Marx's categorisation of abstract labour as general "productive expenditure of human muscles, nerves, brains etc." (Kay, p55) is as unreal a logical deduction as Bohn-Bawerk's reduction of use-value to a common property of all objects (whereas the whole theory of exchange-value is based on the fact that commodities are qualitatively different). However, in rejecting on these grounds the notion of "abstract labour" (while being prepared to accept the formulation of "socially necessary labour") Kay fails to engage with the whole area of the nature of the labour process itself in which the atomisation, etc., of work can indeed be seen as an approximation in reality to the value-defined concept of "abstract labour".

It is exactly this issue, however, which is made central to the analysis of the labour process by David Gleicher. In contrast to Kay, Gleicher argues that "the problem of abstract labour is logically prior to that of socially-necessary labour" (Gleicher, 1983, p98). This is because the measurement of the value of commodities in terms of amounts of socially necessary labour presupposes that this labour is measurable in units of some qualitatively comparable substance, ie abstract labour. Gleicher

therefore proposes "the rendering of an ontology" of abstract labour. He begins by citing the need for an historical approach in which "abstract labour is taken to be actual (concrete) labour that has become independent of, and hence homogeneous across, various use-values, and which comes into existence...only with the advent of capitalism" (Gleicher, 1983, p107).

Gleicher proceeds to examine this, as it were, historical development of abstract labour in terms of the developing tendencies of capitalism.

However, for our purposes the crux of his argument comes when he begins to discuss the exact nature of the "abstractedness" of abstract labour in noting the "fluidity of labour" which capitalism develops. Returning to the problem Kay has already referred to, that of the setting up of a logical construct "abstract labour" as though it were a concrete reality, he rejects the "solution" proposed by the Rubin school that this real essence of an abstraction can "appear historically as the social form, money" (p112). This, Gleicher argues, locates the understanding of abstract labour in the sphere of circulation, whereas "to the contrary, it is through the development of capitalist relations of production that labour - which is otherwise abstracted from the technical aspect of the labour process only in thought - becomes the substance of value; ie, a real social phenomenon" (P113).

Significantly, Gleicher goes on almost immediately to quote from Braverman's reference to how Taylorism and similar work organisation techniques "bring to life the Marxist concept of 'abstract labour' " (Braverman, 1974, p181). Within this perspective, Gleicher can now go on to locate specifically how the analytical concept of abstract labour "comes to life" as it were within the actual organisation of labour under real subordination.

Gleicher himself takes as centrally significant the "Babbage principle" which argues for the division of labour into its simple elements, which are then



distributed among the workforce, not only on the grounds of efficiency but also because such a division depresses wages by deskilling. Leaving aside the wage issue for the moment (this issue will recur in the discussion of exploitation below) for our present purposes the significance of the principle is its transformation of work into "detail labour, no longer being the production of a use-value." (p115)

It is this breakdown, this atomisation of labour as such into a series of minute units which can be adapted to produce any use-value that in our view constitutes the reality of "abstract labour" within the everyday workings of the capitalist labour process. As Gleicher concisely sums up the issue earlier in his article: "Abstract labour, then, is subjective activity of producing use-value that is not specific to the production of any single use-value, but which, to the contrary, represents the possibility of producing a wide variety of use-values" (p107). Mechanisation, he later notes, "deepens" this process through extending the implementation of detail labour throughout the hierarchy of skills so that labour power "becomes, for the first time historically, capable of being employed across industries in the proportion dictated by the rate of profit" (p111). The role of mechanisation in the real subordination of labour is thus again linked in with the development of abstract labour. However, it is the detailed breakdown of working methods and techniques under "scientific management" which is perhaps the furthest refinement of this tendency, one charted in full by Braverman.

Braverman's ~~comment~~ comments on the realisation of abstract labour within the labour process itself have already been alluded to, and it will perhaps be useful to see at this point what more he has to say on the subject. In the conclusion to his chapter on "The Scientific-Technical Revolution and the Worker" in which he has already noted, as the prelude to a detailed discussion of Taylorism, that "The reduction of the worker to the level

of an instrument in the production process is by no means exclusively associated with machinery", (Braverman, 1974, p172) Braverman writes: "It is, finally, worthy of note that in management's eyes as well as in the practice it dictates, the more labour is governed by classified motions which extend across the boundaries of trades and occupations, the more it resolves its concrete forms into the general types of work motions.. This mechanical exercise of human faculties according to motion types which are studied independently of the particular kind of work being done, brings to life the Marxist conception of 'abstract labour'. We see that this abstraction from the concrete forms of labour - the simple 'expenditure of human labour in general' in Marx's phrase - which Marx employed as a means of clarifying the value of commodities...is not something that exists only in the pages of the first chapter of Capital, but exists as well in the mind of the capitalist, the manager, the industrial engineer. It is precisely their effort and metier to visualise labour not as a total human endeavour, but to abstract from all its concrete qualities in order to comprehend it as universal and endlessly repeated motions... Labour in the form of standardised motion patterns is labour used as an interchangeable part, and in this form comes ever closer to corresponding, in life, to the abstraction employed by Marx in analysis of the capitalist mode of production." (Braverman, 1974, p181)

Thus, while Braverman was not primarily concerned with demonstrating the reality of the principle of abstract labour, his whole analysis of the labour process in terms of the separation of conception and execution leads logically to the integration of abstract labour within this analysis. The practical expression of the separation of conception and execution is, historically, "scientific management", and we now turn to the examination of this and its impact on workers' experience of the capitalist labour process.

Although Marx could not have been aware of the development of scientific management, its principles in fact extend and develop the implications of the valorisation objective for the content of the labour process which he identified in mechanisation. The aims of scientific management are as far as possible to systematise and quantify the method and timing of jobs (as well as rationalising plant layout, the progressing of components through the production process, the machine/worker relationship through ergonomics, etc.). Its focus, then, is the whole area of the organisation of work, an area into which capitalism is forced to extend its grip once the requirements of profitability can no longer sufficiently be met by advances in mechanisation alone. The principles of work organisation in this area are normally presented for practical purposes as "time and motion study".

It may be useful to briefly distinguish between the two elements of "time" and "motion". Of the two, the latter perhaps more clearly deserves the label of "scientific". "Motion study" as such was most fully developed by the Gilbreths, working in this field at roughly the same time as F.W. Taylor. Their analysis of movements in work was based on films of workers' activity which were slowed down so that the motions used in work could be analysed into fractions of a second. These were then reconstituted so that the smoothest, most uninterrupted flow of work could be achieved in the least possible time and with maximum "efficiency". The notion of a minimisation of effort and fatigue on the part of the worker as endorsed by work study practitioners takes its meaning from this attempt to maximise the effective interlinking of work motions rather than from any relaxation in the intensification of labour - in fact quite the reverse.

The units of labour isolated by the Gilbreths are at the same time used as the basis for time study. Here a time is allocated to the performance of each movement (usually a fraction of a second) and the times built up to

calculate the expected "performance" for the range of actual jobs on the shops floor. Such time study is almost invariably linked in with an incentive system of payment meaning that any worker who achieves more than "performance", ie works at a faster rate than established in the standard times, earns a bonus. The timed units of motion used as a basis for such schemes (often referred to as "time-measured units") are a clear expression of the flexibility and adaptability of a basic substratum of worker activity which can only be referred to as "abstract labour".

### Intensification and labour time, indifference and exploitation

We have gone on from outlining Marx's theory of abstract labour as embodied in his analysis of valorisation and the practical expression of the valorisation objective in the structure of the labour process itself, to showing how through the development of the logic of intensification of labour in the techniques of scientific management the worker's experience of work becomes, almost literally, "abstract"; work becomes a routine series of detailed movements which for both the worker and the work study technician are to all intents and purposes interchangeable as the worker moves from job to job. Here we are talking about semi-skilled direct production jobs in manufacturing industry, but the point covers a wide area. The implications of the experience of work in jobs which have been atomised, "synthetically" measured or time-studied, routinised and cast in a set series of pre-planned movements will now be explored.

### Intensification of labour

How, then, does the worker experience work, if it is not in terms of its qualitative content? The answer is precisely in terms of those quantitative aspects to which Marx has drawn attention in his exposition of the measurement of value, socially necessary labour time. For Marx, "socially average labour" is "abstract labour"; but, exactly as such, it is judged, not in terms of its useful content, but in terms of its quantity, which, when the limiting factor is time, becomes its intensity. The continual goal of capitalists is to maximise the intensification of labour, meaning that

when the expansion potential of machinery and technology in this regard reaches its temporary limits, attention is switched to the actual organisation of labour itself.

For the workforce in standard manufacturing concerns this is clearly experienced in terms of an overwhelming pressure towards speed and effort; if not direct physical effort, then an intensity of concentration and pressure of application which means that the experience of work comes as close as is feasible to the consistency, continuity and predictability that would be expected of a machine. The comments of two workers quoted in Huw Beynon's book Working For Ford sum up this point: "I just can't get going on nights. Yet you've always got the same times: Ford's times..." "They decide on their measured day how fast we will work. They seem to forget we're not machines y'know..." (Beynon, 1973, p135).

There are countless other examples of this expression of semi-skilled workers' experience, as well as managers' matching preoccupations. Such empirical "evidence" will be discussed at more length in our next chapter, as well as in the case studies. Meanwhile we need to ask: If workers in this situation do not respond to their work primarily in terms of its qualitative content, in what terms do they respond?

#### Indifference to content, concern with reward

Marx is quite clear as to the lack of concern shown by workers under the real subordination of labour to the content of their work, both in terms of the specific task itself and the branch of industry in which he or she works: "Just as capital...views with indifference the particular physical guise in which labour appears in the labour process...so too the worker looks upon the particular content of his labour with equal indifference. His work belongs to capital, it is only the use-value of the commodity that he has sold, and he has only sold it to acquire money and, with the

money, the means of subsistence...If his indifference to the particular content of his work does not give him the power to vary his labour-power to order, he will express his indifference by inducing his replacements, the rising generation, to move from one branch of industry to the next, depending on the state of the market." (p1013)

The requirement of industry for flexibility and malleability of labour, then - for labour that is "moved around" as required for the objective of valorisation - is reflected in the lack of concern of the semi-skilled worker over the actual work done and her focus, instead, on the sale and price of labour-power. It is this interaction between the sale of labour-power, taking place though it does "outside" the labour process, and worker response within the labour process itself, which in our view forms a crucial focus for the study of the labour process within late capitalism.

A useful way of approaching some of these interrelations is through their treatment in a paper entitled "Labour Time, Work Measurement and the Commensuration of Labour" by P.S. Taylor. While it is gratifying to see attention being paid to the issue of labour-time in the analysis of the labour process, Taylor's treatment itself reflects a familiar preoccupation with the use-value aspects of labour. In his analysis of worker response to Taylorist work measurement schemes, Taylor attacks Sohn-Rethel's contention that unit times under such schemes have an objective scientific validity, through the argument that the timing of jobs is always "a process of mutually conditioning calculation on the part of those being timed and those undertaking the timing" (Taylor, 1979, p27). Taylor uses the undoubted existence of such "workers' measurement" of work as a basis for emphasising the qualitative, concrete aspects of work in the worker's experience, and quotes Marx's dictum that "the work is not done twice over" (see above, p3) to prove his point.

To talk about "workers' measurement" is not, in fact, to demonstrate convincingly that there is no "scientific" component in the systematic, standardised measurement of work times by management. Yet even on the "workers' side", Taylor's exposition can be taken to prove exactly the opposite of what he is arguing; that workers' "physical" knowledge of their jobs, while undoubtedly far more intimate than that of management, is not judged and valued as concrete, specific labour, by its practitioners, but in terms of ways around the job which can be turned to their advantage when bargaining with management.

The concrete content of work, then, in terms of familiarity with materials, tools, working methods, is not the content of some worker experience which reflects an intrinsically different approach to work from that of management, but is used, just as management uses it, in a monetary calculation. Workers subjected to routine and undifferentiated work patterns, in which the intensification of labour as value-creation is the prime perspective of management, will out of the experience of that intensification and abstraction see their labour not primarily as concrete and useful but as an element in a value calculation which in their case relates to the value of their subsistence. And it is this dual conditioning of worker response to the labour process by the objective of valorisation and its corollary in the purchase of labour power - in the endemic struggle between effort and reward - that the relationship of exploitation, to which we now turn, finds its expression in the heart of the labour process.

### Exploitation and the Labour Theory of Value

The understanding of "exploitation" on which we have progressed so far, and which we shall continue to uphold, is one which is premised on an analysis of production of surplus value within the capitalist labour process. This in turn holds two further implications for the management or experience of the labour process : the extraction of effort on the one

hand and the struggle for subsistence on the other. The concept of "surplus value" is, however, itself controversial, and therefore before turning to some theories of exploitation it will be necessary to take a brief excursion into the defence of the labour theory of value.

What has been questioned by critics of this theory, leaving the more complex technicalities behind, is firstly the lack of commensuration between exchange values, as measured in terms of embodied labour time, and secondly the whole notion that labour should or can be considered as the sole "determinant" of value.

The first criticism can be approached via Marx's comment on classical political economy that "it has never once asked the question why...labour is expressed in value, and why the measurement of labour by its duration is expressed in the magnitude of the value of the product" (Marx, 1976, p174). In other words, Ricardo's notion of embodied labour times as the measure of exchange value provides no room for the concept of unpaid labour time as the basis of surplus value and for the concept of socially necessary labour time (rather than actual labour times) as a standard for the measure of the amount of surplus value necessary for firms to survive under conditions of capitalist competition. Along the same lines, Ricardo made no distinction between labour and labour power. For him labour was just labour - bought by the capitalist as such and embodied in specific time-measured segments of production. There is no recognition in this analysis of labour's potential to produce more value than is required for the reproduction of labour-power, or of the way in which this potential is estimated according to the given level of development of the forces of production to result in a corresponding socially average rate of surplus value. It is this static, concrete view of labour which leads Marx to comment that Ricardo ".... does not examine the form - the peculiar characteristic of labour that creates exchange-value or manifests itself in exchange-value - the nature



of this labour" (Marx, 1969, p164).

It is through the examination of this "peculiar characteristic", as  
(1978)  
Himmelweit and Mohan show, that the problem of the "lack of commensuration"  
between exchange-value and prices can be overcome. Once it is emphasised  
that surplus value is produced within the process of production itself,  
through the unique "use-value" of labour power, as opposed to simply being  
realised through exchange, then the link between the two elements in the  
relation between value and price, socially necessary labour time and paid  
labour time, can be understood in the framework of capitalist competition.  
Different capitals will attempt to compensate for higher than socially  
necessary labour times through the price mechanism, but at the same time  
the attempt to equate paid labour times through the intensification of  
labour takes place within the production process itself.

The same significance and uniqueness of the use-value of labour in the  
creation of surplus value can be invoked in challenging the second  
criticism mentioned above, that there is no basis for "privileging" labour  
as the sole determinant of value. An example of this is the argument of  
Cutler et al, cited by Olin Wright (cf Steedman, 1981) that a number of  
variables including the socio technical conditions of production, the  
financial activities of capitalists, and even the weather, play equally as  
important a part as labour in "determining" whether or not profits will be  
produced. However, such conditions come into a different explanatory  
category than the "surplus value" which is listed alongside them; they  
can only be "determinants" (possible excluders, or necessary conditions)  
and not sources of profit. Obviously there are a range of conditions which  
have to be fulfilled in order for profits to be produced, of which labour  
can be said to be only one; however, the specific role of labour has to  
be understood in terms of its unique capacity to create more value than  
is required for its own reproduction. To overlook the difference between

these categories is once again to relegate labour to the status of a quantity of embodied labour time which can be added on to other equivalent constituents to produce (or not, if one of the "conditions" is absent) the final result, profit. To do this, as we have tried to show, is to misunderstand the unique character of labour in its interaction with capital as the creator of value and surplus-value. (For the strand of this argument relating to the distinction between labour-power and labour, see P. 7ff above, also ch. 2).

### The Commodity Status of Labour

The theory of the unique surplus-value creating function of labour, then, far from being undermined by the argument that labour is no more essential to value production than any other "factor" of production, is in fact essential to an understanding of capitalism as distinct from other modes of production. The fundamental role of surplus-value production is, however, in its turn conditional on another dimension of the relationship equally intrinsic to the whole operation of capitalism; wage labour, expressed in the commodity status of labour. As a prelude to examining the nature of exploitation, it is necessary to at least briefly touch on this concept (its more political implications regarding worker response are discussed in the next chapter).

The concept of the commodity status of labour, while accepted without much comment by many writers within the labour process debate, has recently undergone some questioning. The major theorists who appear to have seriously criticised the concept are John MacInnes (1984), William Lazonick (1983), and Herbert Gintis and Samuel Bowles (1981). The main argument behind the criticism is that labour is in fact not like any other commodity, but is

crucially different, not indeed in its capacity to generate surplus value, but in its "belonginess" to human beings, ie people who are a) open to ideological influences from family, school and state and b) liable to resist and oppose the use of their commodity.

Much of this ground has already been gone over in the discussion of the distinction between labour-power and labour, but the questioning of the status of labour as a commodity represents an even stronger attempt by theorists to remove issues surrounding the organisation of an response to the labour process out of the economic sphere altogether. Thus Gintis and Bowles remark towards the end of their article: "...by banishing politics and culture from the work place, the representation of labour as the use-value of labour power promotes a technological view of the labour process, thereby undermining the critique of the authoritarianism of capitalist everyday life. Further, in this view it is the property relationship, not the more inclusive domination of the labour process, which assumes the crucial analytical role. Classical Marxian economics thus comes close to the neoclassical competitive model in which, as Samuelson aptly observes, 'it makes no difference whether the capitalist hires the worker, or the other way around'." (Gintis and Bowles, 1981, p17).

The conception of labour-power as a commodity, in this analysis as in, say, Lazonick's, is supposed to remove all consideration of response or resistance from the analysis of the labour process. But to understand the role of labour power as a commodity is to perceive the very opposite of this. The sale of labour power is precisely seen to be not "interchangeable" between capitalists and workers if we understand the relationship between the amount of value paid out in wages and the generation of surplus value in the labour process. Even more importantly, to understand the role of wage-labour as a commodity in the workings of capitalist society is to understand first of all that workers have to sell their labour power and

secondly, and crucially for our understanding of the labour process, that they have to defend and fight for its price. Resistance within the labour process is therefore based on precisely those grounds - defence of the price of labour power, or subsistence, on the one hand, extraction of maximum surplus value on the other - which surround the commodity status of labour. The commodity status of labour is thus intrinsic to exploitation, which in our argument is submitted to be central to worker resistance in the capitalist labour process.

### Exploitation

In those theories which have been developed concerning exploitation itself, however, we again find a reluctance to confront any economic rationale for managerial strategy and worker response in the labour process. Thus while we have argued that surplus value is intrinsic to exploitation, Geoff Hodgson has argued in an early piece on exploitation that "Under feudalism and slavery, for example, exploitation can take place without surplus value" (Hodgson, 1976, p3) and this is developed to provide a theory centred on "appropriation" rather than exploitation.

In this way in later versions of his argument Hodgson extends his "non-labour-theory-of-value" definition of exploitation (1982, Ch.18) to embrace four categories: corporeal, authority, class and, in "pre-contractual" relations, bargaining exploitation. To look at the concept in this way is of course to eliminate the notion of the value-producing aspects of the capitalist labour process; and in fact Hodgson replaces this with a conception of exploitation as the appropriation of surplus value by the dominant class, which can occur in any class-divided mode of production. Exploitation is thus "criticised" on grounds of its contravention of bourgeois ideals of justice and fairness: "The labourer provides more than an appropriable object. But, according to bourgeois 'justice', the capitalist receives a reward for only providing an appropriable object" (Hodgson, 1976, p15).

The concept of exploitation is thus lifted out of the context of production and value-creation and removed to the sphere of political and ideological relations as an issue of the inequitable appropriation of property.

A similar view of exploitation as "appropriation" of surplus labour and thus as indictable primarily in moral or "radical" grounds rather than in terms of an inherent contradiction within capitalism, can be found in the work of John E. Roemer. Roemer begins with a complex excursion into various imaginary "models" which purport to show that exploitation occurs even where there is no system of property ownership, no surplus and no institution for labour exchange. In thus moving towards the goal of a "general" theory of exploitation, he presents the argument that exploitation can be solely defined as the expropriation of labour (in an economy with 2 producers, if "Mr i works more than b, and Ms j works less than b, then j is exploiting i") and that this must "force a reconsideration of the classical Marxist claim that exploitation takes place primarily in the labour market and in the extraction of surplus labour at the point of production" (Roemer, 1982, p258).

For Roemer, exploitation is a simple relationship posited purely in terms of "a differential ownership of the means of production" which can enable one producer, even in an economy without a labour market, to extract a more than equivalent share of social labour from a fellow producer. However, in order to modify this "general" model towards what Roemer conceives of as the Marxist theoretisation of exploitation and class, some notion of coercion is seen as necessary. It is on the basis of this that Roemer both (correctly) locates such coercion at the level of the economic compulsion involved in maintaining property relations at the level of the market and (incorrectly) dismisses labour process analysis for making such coercion central to the task of "extracting surplus labour directly from the worker".

With this second argument Roemer has identified a position which sees the labour process as central to exploitation with one which presents "coercion" as equally crucial to achieving exploitation within the labour process. Although Roemer is perhaps justified in the content of the current labour process debate in imputing such a position, there is in fact no necessary connection between the two arguments. It is quite possible to argue, as Marx does, that the labour process is the site of the production of surplus value and also to agree with Roemer that such production does not depend on direct coercion which rather exists in the form of economic compulsion at the level of the exchange of labour power. Roemer himself, however, appears to have as it were thrown out the whole of the labour process perspective with the notion of coercion. This dismissal of the labour process as central to exploitation is in its turn possible for Roemer only because of his persistent conceptualisation of exploitation as the appropriation of surplus labour. Here the retention of "labour" rather than value as the content of the appropriation is perhaps more fundamentally significant even than the implications of the term "appropriation" itself. It is logical in view of his refusal to take the analysis beyond the surrender of labour to the creation of value that Roemer should now go on to pose what he himself describes as the "venerable" question of why "Marxists choose labour power as the numeraire commodity for defining value and exploitation" (Roemer, 1982, p273).

In arguing that "Labour power as a commodity is not unique in its magical property of producing more value than it embodies" (p273) Roemer misses the point that labour is the sole activating (valorising) force for all forms of capital and that it is precisely in this that the endemic contradictions between capital and labour, embodied in exploitation, lies. Roemer is forced to look rather for such strange self-justifying "purpose(s) of a theory of exploitation" as the need for Marxists to explain and justify the historical phenomenon of "poor workers fighting rich capitalists" (Roemer, 1982, p275).

Once again, a theory which defines exploitation simply in terms of the appropriation of surplus labour has failed to locate exploitation as the site of an inherent contradiction in capitalist relations of production.

### Subsistence as Contested within the Labour Process

In our own interpretation, on the other hand, a dual approach to this contradiction is developed in which not only the incessant drive to maximise surplus value through the intensification of labour is emphasised but also the pressure on workers' subsistence in terms of the expansion of paid in relation to unpaid labour time.

It is important to acknowledge not only the maximisation of unpaid as opposed to paid labour time in terms of the increased productivity of labour via machinery, technology, work organisation etc, but also the processes whereby the value of labour power is actually lowered in absolute terms in two ways: firstly its "cheapening" via deskilling and secondly more direct attempts to reduce wages through cutting piece rates, reducing overtime etc.

In drawing attention to the cheapening of labour power through deskilling we do not maintain that capitalists have introduced techniques which deskill labour with the primary purpose of reducing wages; we adhere rather to the argument put so far that such techniques are introduced in an attempt to reduce socially necessary labour time and increase productivity. However, the effect of such developments is that a smaller proportion of capital is devoted to the purchase of labour power, both in the sense that purchased labour is more productive of surplus and also that, in absolute terms, semi-skilled and unskilled labour is worth less on the labour market. This process is thus clearly a vital aspect of the continued potential of capitals to generate profit and is rightly emphasised by Gleicher (1983, p115).

The second point, however, is more central to our current argument. In struggles over reward within the workplace itself, whether initiated by workers or management, the issue of subsistence can be argued to be brought directly into the labour process as such. With this suggestion, important to our own thesis as a whole, we can be said to go further than Marx, who notes in passing that "These means of subsistence themselves form no part of the labour process, which, apart from the presence of effective labour power, requires nothing but the materials and means of labour " (Marx, 1976, 1004).

At the same time it is, as we have seen, crucial to the whole argument about valorisation that "when we look at the process of capitalist production as a whole and not merely at the immediate production of commodities, we find that although the sale and purchase of labour power ...is entirely separate from the immediate production process, and indeed precedes it, yet it forms the absolute foundation of capitalist production and is an integral moment within it." (p1005)

As this "absolute foundation", the level of subsistence is continually contested within capitalism, and one important expression of this, we would submit, is the endemic struggle over the relation between effort and reward which actually takes place within the labour process itself. Clear examples of this are the pressures on piecework norms and overtime opportunities which, as our case studies show, daily threaten workers' living standards as an immediate aspect of their interaction with the production process.

There are two ways in which the "subsistence" strand of exploitation directly affects workers' experience of and response to the labour process:

(i) Workers' valuation of their labour as the substance of a commodity

We have already discussed, in looking at the commodity status of labour, the way in which workers' response to the labour process is based centrally



on resistance around and defence of the price of labour power. More immediately in terms of the rationale and meaning of work as a daily experience, it can be said that for workers engaged directly in producing surplus this is seen overwhelmingly in terms of subsistence, of "working for money". This central conception of work in terms which relate to the market has an impact even where subsistence is not directly tied in with the organisation of the labour process itself; workers at Ford's, for example, who were paid on a day rather than a piece rate, were nevertheless so disenchanted by the company's attitude towards parity and other pay issues that commitment to the work itself dropped sharply (Beynon, 1973); similar relationships are shown in Edwards and Scullion's (1982) study.

(ii) Pay as an "incentive"

Nevertheless, it is with the direct use of pay as a sanction within the labour process - as an "incentive" - that we are most concerned. While Marx again specifically rejects the significance of piecework - "the piece-wage is nothing but a converted form of the time wage"(p692) - it is clear from our case study examples (chapters 4-7 passim) that the use of piecework and other forms of bonus, as well as overtime payments, plays a crucial role in the intensification of labour. As maximisers of their own subsistence, workers clearly have a motive for continuing in such practices; as a worker in our first case study commented, "They (management) don't like low performance, the people on the floor don't like low performance either." The objectives of management and workers are here inherently contradictory; they can be expressed as the maximisation of on the one hand unpaid and on the other paid labour time. But, within the reward/effort nexus integrated in this way into the labour process itself, the two conflicting objectives crucially interact and form an endemic basis for conflict. As such the struggle over subsistence is brought directly into the heart of the labour process itself and interacts with the capitalist objective of valorisation.

In this prior section on exploitation we have attempted to locate the contradictions inherent in the production of surplus value and to expand the analysis into the impact of exploitation on workers not only in terms of the intensification of their labour but also in relation to their standards of living. We go on to examine how this fundamental structure of exploitation may actually surface, or be "phenomenalised", in the daily experience of the worker.

We conclude, then, by looking at the way in which the contradictions discussed may emerge in the experience of the worker, focussing on the question: Can workers perceive exploitation? Clearly, although workers often refer to a distinction between "my time" and "the company's time" (see case studies) the dividing line between the amount of value represented in wages and the surplus value produced beyond this is not one which can be "perceived" in the course of a working day, even by the most class-conscious worker.

The "phenomenalisation" of exploitation in the experience of the worker does not, then, lie in the any direct perception of the extraction of unrecompensed value, but in the expression of this process in terms of an endemic struggle within the labour process over factors themselves extrinsic to the content of work itself, the amount of effort required of the workforce and the level of reward received by them. To pose the material expression of exploitation in terms of this effort/reward nexus is to recall the concept of the "effort bargain" developed by Baldamus (1961) in the 50s and now enjoying some renewed attention as a perspective on the labour power/labour question. However, Baldamus' conception of the effort bargain contains no analysis of conflict, concentrating rather on the "bargain" side of the managerial problem of the incomplete contract between employer and employee. By contrast, our argument, while emphasising the expression of exploitation as a struggle which embraces both effort and reward, invokes an inherent contradiction and thus irreconcilable conflict

between the interests of labour and capital.

An interesting alternative attempt at a phenomenalisation of exploitation is made by Erik Olin Wright (cf Steedman, 1981, p67) in his categorisation of different strata of labour time and their relationship to "forms of class struggle". The significance of Wright's complex division of the working day into many more levels than are implied by the simple distinction between paid and unpaid labour time lies not so much in any attempt to invoke worker perception of such divisions as in the argument that battles over labour time can once again be linked to the "variability" of labour and thus to managerial problems of "control". Thus Wright's later argument appears to suggest that the struggles over the length of rest breaks, etc., which obviously do go on at the point of production, are at the centre of the struggle to extract surplus value. In this way emphasis is laid on the attempt to minimise non-productive time rather than on the intensification of labour during productive time in order to maximise surplus value. In fact there is a built-in limit to the extent that management can control the variability of labour power by insisting that as many productive hours as possible be worked, and this is the limit to which Marx drew attention in his distinction between absolute and relative surplus value. The real nub of the struggle over exploitation, then, must be seen in the attempt to minimise paid labour time within production, by decreasing socially necessary labour time through the intensification of labour, rather than by limiting non-productive time. Part of this struggle on the workers' side is also the attempt to maintain or increase reward or, in a different formulation, to maximise the amount of paid labour time.

#### Exploitation, consciousness and resistance

One objection to the perspective we have tried to outline in this chapter is that it assumes the existence of exploitation and thus its impact in struggle whether or not workers are conscious of the fact that they are

exploited. Exploitation, as we have already pointed out, cannot be "perceived" as such, but our argument does not depend on this perception. As Cutler et al correctly point out, "Marx does not make the class struggle dependent on consciousness of exploitation" (Cutler et al, 1977, p46). The way in which class experience and thus consciousness is mediated by the underlying reality of exploitation will be examined more closely in a moment. Meanwhile we go on to explore the implications of certain ways of presenting the analysis of exploitation.

As an example, we have some definitions by Erik Olin Wright in an earlier part of the article discussed above. Wright observes: "Class struggles do not directly affect surplus-value and exploitation, but operate through effects on the socio-technical conditions of production...and on the real wage of workers...In capitalism, precisely because the performance of surplus labour is disguised through the exchange process and the organisation of production as a capitalist labour process, class struggles are never over surplus labour as such" (Steedman, 1981, p54). Of course, assessment of this argument depends partly on the definition of "class struggle". But, if it is extended to include everyday resistance by workers within the capitalist labour process, even if class struggles are not "over" exploitation they can be regarded as a function of it (and thus, in turn, as "affecting" it). What Wright is doing here is taking the "obscuring" or mystifying of exploitation as the basis for the assumption that therefore there is no relationship between exploitation and class struggle. Workers do not perceive their exploitation (either in reality or conceptually), therefore their struggles can have nothing to do with it.

In contrast to this we are concerned to show that it is the underlying structure of exploitation which has the immanent effects within the capitalist labour process which workers resist. In this sense we have to ask: what is the meaning of exploitation for the worker? This way of posing the question is

provoked by another formulation of exploitation, this time put by G.A. Cohen. Cohen argues (on the basis of a "reduced" definition of exploitation stating simply that workers receive less value than they create) that "The labour theory of surplus-value is, then, unnecessary to the moral claim Marxists make when they say that capitalism is exploitative. It does not matter what explains the difference between the value the worker produces and the value he receives. What matters is just that there is that difference between the value the worker produces and the value he receives. What matters is just that there is that difference. (Cohen, 1981, p208) But the explanation, or the reason, for "that difference" does matter in that it is the incessant drive to extract surplus value, with its consequent assault on workers' lives and living standards, which constructs the experience of large numbers of, in particular, semi-skilled workers. When asking whether it matters for moralists, sociologists or philosophers, it would perhaps not be out of place to ask whether it matters for the working class.

In concentrating on workers' experience of exploitation through the analysis of its expression in the effort bargain and struggles around labour time, we have not only sought to locate the analysis of exploitation in surplus-value production but have also, through this location, presented a content of worker resistance which is primarily "economistic"- concerned with pay, allocation of jobs, job timings, job security - rather than centring on issues related to the use-value-producing aspects of the labour process.

The implications of a theory of exploitation based on the production of surplus value within the capitalist labour process are thus two-fold. On the one hand it indicates a level of internal contradiction within capitalist relations of production which, it is argued, is more fundamental and thus more generative of continued resistance than the moral inconsistencies which are highlighted by a conception of exploitation as "appropriation". On the other, it focusses on the need to examine the material impact of these contradictions within the daily operation of the capitalist labour process and in this

light to reassess the content and likely trajectory of worker resistance.

We thus arrive at an analysis which turns the problematic, so to speak, the other way round - from the roots of experience in capitalist reality to consciousness and resistance by workers, rather than from the level of consciousness implied by an assumption of overt resistance to the development of the labour process as such, to the "control"-based resistance which is predicated on that consciousness. Notions of struggle within the labour process centred purely on the articulation of "power" relations between management and the workforce must be re-evaluated in the context of an analysis which locates an endemic level of conflict in economic contradictions rather than ideological struggles.

The response within industrial sociology to conflict at the point of production has veered from portraying shop-floor struggles as irredeemably parochial and restricted to presenting them as revolutionary examples of "workers' control". The latter is obviously far from the truth. Nevertheless it is worth questioning the current preoccupation with ideological categories in the analysis of the labour process and exploring the possible political implications of the more pragmatic **struggles focussed on in the above**. These questions will be dealt with at more length in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The "Real World" of Workers

#### 1 Introduction

In the analysis so far we have both criticised the current "labour process debate" for placing too little emphasis on the material considerations underlying both "control" and "resistance" within the labour process and also, particularly in the last chapter, presented an analysis of the specifically capitalist labour process which locates worker resistance in the fundamental economic contradictions at the heart of that process. From both of these points of view we have arrived in effect at a conception of worker response to the labour process as primarily economistic; and it is this conception which we now set out to defend.

A defence is required, for the notion of "economism", first identified by Lenin, is not a popular one. The response of most theorists has been either to condemn economistic activity on the part of the working class as "incorporationist" or "labourist", or simply to pretend that it does not exist. In this chapter I set out first of all to show that worker response is largely economistic, and secondly to bring out the political implications of this very economism in terms of the following three points:

(i) "Economistic" struggles by workers, ie those surrounding pay and other terms and conditions of employment, are based on fundamental contradictions within production which influence and characterise the capitalist system as a whole.

(ii) The nature of economistic resistance is neither as static or as inherently limited as much of the literature has suggested. Economistic activity by workers is not only endemic, because of the contradictions referred to above, it is also dynamic and explosive - movements based on economic demands can go much further than the demands themselves. Finally,

the role of economistic struggles in undermining the political and ideological hegemony to which recent writers have drawn attention, should be recognised.

(iii) Spontaneous outbreaks of resistance by workers which are triggered by the contradictions within the capitalist labour process may themselves be transitory (as many of the examples below suggest) but they contribute to the building up of working class organisation, which itself has political ramifications and may lead to widespread action in defence of that organisation with the potential to challenge the capitalist state.

In expanding on these three points the argument will engage not only with the approach to worker response presented most recently within the labour process debate, but also with the much wider literature on "class consciousness" which has captured the attention of theorists over much the same period as the large-scale development of mass production and apparent decline in revolutionary activity by the working class, ie the post-war years. However, since it is with the labour process itself that we are centrally concerned, we begin by looking more closely at what the labour process debate has had to say about worker response.

## 2 Workers and the Labour Process: A "Frontier of Control"?

In earlier chapters, especially Chapter 1, we attempted to specify the main features of the position within the labour process debate on worker response, which, as we saw, was pinpointed by many writers as the major omission of Braverman's analysis. Three key areas were picked out: worker resistance to deskilling, resistance to the transformation of labour power into labour, and a dynamic of class struggle/managerial domination in which the main issue of contest, if any, is the relations of production themselves.

However, none of these three areas give us a very precise description of the actual nature of worker resistance on a day-to-day basis within the labour process, particularly given the insistence of many writers that struggle



continues under the real subordination of labour (a point which, as we have tried to show, neither Marx nor Braverman would wish to deny). The most specific references to the actual nature of workplace struggles seem to appear once again under the heading of "control", this time discussed from the 'workers' side". We shall therefore briefly survey the examples of "control" which are presented as either aspired to or exercised by workers within the literature, and go on to relate these to the conception, currently enjoying a popular revival, of a "frontier of control".

One area in which a clear specification of "control" objectives by workers is articulated appears to be that of drives towards worker "discretion" or "autonomy". Here a definite focus on job content is marked out by the argument. Littler and Salaman, for example, quote Bendix in pointing out that "'...there exists an exercise of discretion important even in relatively menial jobs....'" to which they add: "Whilst such zones of discretion may be squeezed by Taylorite employer strategies or by the introduction of new technology, it never is reduced to zero. Thus workers are still faced with alternative courses of action when presented with a piece passing by on the assembly line" (Littler & Salaman, 1982, p262). The same rather marginal degree of worker choice over the outcome of the labour process is referred to in Wood and Mainwaring's notion of "tacit skills" (cf Wood and Mainwaring, 1984)

Writers like Hill (1981) and Storey (1983) have also at times defined control on the part of workers in terms of discretion and autonomy; Hill in contradistinction to the strategies employed by managers to gain control: "The concern to restore creativity and control is a reaction against those managerial strategies described earlier...Although ...some companies have learnt that an acceptable degree of managerial control can now be maintained without totally denying shopfloor discretion...the control issue...brings into the open the fact that profitability has depended on denying autonomy and creativity." (Hill, 1981, 131).

Storey again directly relates the two issues of autonomy and control (on the workers' part), emphasising the "importance of preserving some scope for autonomous regulation, the need for some measure of control. It is hard to imagine a 100 per cent production standard being maintained precisely as ordained without some attempt being made to vary the routine. Equally, other forms of restriction of output cannot be equated with this drive for autonomy " (Storey, 1983, 169).

As shown below, it is theoretically possible to analytically distinguish a drive for "control" per se on the part of workers. However, the problem is that both in practice and as that practice is reflected in the comments of the theoreticians, such issues are rarely separated from what are, in terms of the quest for "control", the much muddier waters of workers' general defensive strategies at the point of production. Through a theoretical sleight of hand, rather similar to that involved in the analysis of management, a conflation occurs between these rather more down-to-earth activities and an assumed overarching objective of "control".

Thus directly after defining control in terms of an immediately job-related autonomy, Storey provides on the next page as an example of a control struggle by workers the response of the Solihull Rover shop stewards to the planned closure of their plant. Earlier, a list of examples of worker resistance ranges from the halting of the EL Metro Line because of speed-up, through the miners' reversal of the pit closures plan in 1980-1 to the defeat of the Industrial Relations Act. While these are indeed all examples of worker resistance, they cannot be presented in an undifferentiated fashion as instances of the managerial difficulty with transforming labour power into labour, as is the case in Storey's argument.

A similar conflation is evident in Paul Thompson's (1983) presentation of a number of different arguments by labour process writers on the issue of "control" by workers. Thus Thompson, having aligned the arguments of Friedman on "responsible autonomy" along with those of Burawoy and Edwards in making the point that the concentration of capital itself "pushes managers to grant or concede levels of discretion to the shop floor", refers to the major empirical example illustrating Friedman's thesis, the car industry in Coventry, in which the principle of mutuality has long been a key feature of worker organisation. In this way questions of the "discretion" or "autonomy" of workers on the shop floor are directly tied in with what, when looked at closely, is a hard-nosed and extremely effective example of workers organising round primarily economic issues. "Mutuality" is defined in this very argument as process of mutual determination of piecework prices, and of the introduction of new methods which would affect these prices, between the workforce and management. Are we then to conclude that the notion of "control" boils down to no more than the parochial and piecemeal bargaining over effort and reward which in the past, as pointed out in Chapter 2, has been regarded as being outside the territory of the labour process debate?

If this is indeed the case, the literature shows little recognition of it. The conflation between the kind of defensive production-related activity which can plausibly be given the title of "job controls" and the far broader and more elevated objective of "workers' control" is incisively demonstrated by Jean Monds (1976) in his critique of the arguments of labour historians such as Montgomery, Stone and Hinton. Yet Thompson again glosses over the crucial differences between these two areas when he writes that "Goodrich's classic study of workshop politics showed how workers countered managerial power by extending their own 'frontiers of control' with respect to organisation of work, changes in technology, and

methods of payment. Demands for workers' control were an extension of the degree of job control already exercised" (Thompson, 1983, 59).

The irony is that Goodrich, author both of the book and of the phrase, "The Frontier of Control", which has recently gained such popularity among theorists of the labour process, carried out extremely painstaking attempts to distinguish theoretically between the different implications of the term "control". He was well aware of its ambiguity: "Nor is control so simple and definite a thing...in actual reference to the facts of industry it breaks up into a bewildering variety of rights and claims..." Shortly afterwards he quotes a contemporary report in pointing out that "It is essential...to disentangle as far as possible the economic and non-economic factors" (Goodrich, 1975, 18).

No such caution as to definition appears to affect the latter-day users of the concept, as demonstrated in Edwards and Scullion's The Social Organisation of Industrial Conflict (1982), a study in the "industrial relations" school whose contents we shall be examining more closely below. The authors introduce the concept of "control", and its fluctuating nature, by stating that "...the frontier of control has been shifted more in the shopfloor's favour in the two Company B plants than in any of our other factories. Shop stewards played a crucial role in all aspects of the wage-effort bargain, having a substantial role in the planning of work, being able to prevent... the movement of workers between jobs, and controlling rotas for overtime themselves" (p22).

"Control", then, is directly identified here with the "wage-effort bargain". Yet both Goodrich's own arguments, and the actual use of the term "control" by labour process theorists, are testimony that its implications go far beyond this. On pp36-7, for example, Goodrich states that "control is a political word" and then notes: "'Political', that is, in the wide sense of being concerned with authority relationships." Goodrich's own discussion of the "frontier" of control

(as opposed to "control" itself) can be related to another aspect of Edwards and Scullion's approach (and indeed that of others who have used the concept); the assumption that the "frontier" of control is a kind of marker indicating how much control workers and stewards may have within the labour process at any one time. "Control", indeed (rather like value in the capitalist perspective) appears to be regarded as an undifferentiated substance of which the question to be asked is not what it is about, but how much of it there is.

Cressey and MacInnes have remarked on this "quantitative" approach to control in their comment that "Judging by the use of concepts like a frontier of control...it (control) appears to be a zero-sum concept. That is to say, it makes sense to think of a distribution of control, with the implication that what one side gains the other loses " (Cressey & MacInnes, 1977, p280). However, they use this as a basis for arguing their own case for an integrative perspective on control rather than attempting to explore (despite their recognition that it is "woefully inadequately theorised") what control is all about.

Goodrich himself uses the notion of a frontier of control in two ways. While the usage to which most current authors refer, that of the flexibility and dynamic nature of the balance of power between workers and management, is undoubtedly intended, Goodrich actually introduces the concept in terms of a dividing line or "borderline" between the concerns which are seen as appropriate territory for workers and for management. As he asks in beginning his chapter: "Where does the issue come into the open? At what point does the employer say - beyond this there shall be no discussion, the rest is my business alone?" (Goodrich, 1975, p56).

The difference between this and the conception of "frontier of control" purely in terms of struggle, of "contested terrain", is that the attempt to

locate the "borderline" engages with the issue of what "control" is about. The discussion shows convincingly that the areas identified in collective agreements, etc., as exclusively the sphere of the employer are consistently referred to as those of "discipline and management". Difficult though these terms are themselves to precisely define, it seems clear that they denote spheres the aspiration to which by workers might plausibly come under the heading of the demand for control per se.

Yet, paradoxically, the more deserving of the title of "control", the less such demands seem to be either aspired to or achieved by workers. Defining them as "political" demands, Goodrich distinguishes between "the demand not to be controlled disagreeably, the demand not to be controlled at all, and the demand to take a hand in controlling" and goes on: "The first runs through all trade union activity. The second is less widespread...The third - the desire for a share in the job of running things - is real but less immediate " (p37). And in the subsequent chapter on Control, Goodrich answers his own question "What degree of control do the trade unions exercise over the relations of man to man in industry - the employment and discipline relationships; and over the relations of man to the work itself - to the plans, process, and techniques of industry?" with the confession that "The first and obvious answer is - directly and explicitly, very little " (p55).

Yet this recognition of the lack both of aspiration towards and achievement of what can unambiguously be termed "control" by workers need not be used as the basis for a cynical dismissal of such objectives. Rather, both in Goodrich's analysis and in the current argument, such recognition can be used to locate the significance of workers' underlying resentment at being denied discretion and dignity in their work. With Goodrich, we can assess this ongoing animosity as a breeding-ground for

more explicit conflict rather than a focus for overt conflict in itself; as the source of dislocation and alienation from the perspective of the employer rather than an explicit ground for organisation against that employer. Goodrich distinguishes clearly between the explicit, "political" demand for control and this more widespread resentment:

"The demand for personal freedom within industry is not identical with the demand for political power within industry; the one begins as a desire for no government, the other is a desire for a share in self-government " (p34). Yet this vaguer need for "personal freedom" is recognised as underlying much more specific conflicts: "...the occasion or formulated issue of a strike, as of a war, is only a part of its cause or of the emotions that are called out; surely a part of the emotion that gathers around any industrial struggle is that of servant against master. It is in this sense that Mr Straker (Miners' Federation leader) calls 'the straining of the will of man to be free' the root cause of labour unrest"(p38).

A dialectical relationship is thus indicated between fundamental "control" variables and the more pressing needs that actually propel workers into struggle - a relationship that will be returned to when we examine the dynamic between worker acquiescence and resistance in Chapter 5 below. Meanwhile, this insight that a conscious, explicit formulation of grievances, or programmes built around those grievances, is not a necessary feature of struggles which in fact do draw much of their strength from such grievances, leads us to the final point we wish to draw from Goodrich's analysis.

This is that, first of all, workers on the whole do not see, or wish to see, their needs and demands as existing in the same sphere as those of management. Not only does the employer not wish organised workers to take part in the decision-making process regarding investment;

most workers, traditionally at least, would see this as "not their business". This point is further pursued when we look, again in chapter 5, at Haworth and Ramsie's notion of the separate "universes" of management and labour.

Second, and more germane to our present argument, the sphere that workers do, of necessity, regard as centrally their "business" is, of course, that of subsistence, both in itself and in its relation to effort. It is thus that, as acknowledged by Goodrich and in practice, most workgroup activity referred to by a term, "control", which we have seen to have considerably wider implications, in fact relates to just this primarily "economistic" dynamic. In Goodrich's words "most of the complicated forms of control are themselves merely elaborate safeguards of the standard of living" (p20).

To make this point, however, is not to adopt the mechanistic position that no interaction with "control" variables per se is indicated in workers' struggles, or that "workers' control" is not a concept that workers can now or could ever relate to. It is to emphasise, strongly, that such struggles which raise the potential for wider "control" demands themselves spring from, are rooted in, basic economic contradictions as expressed at the point of production in the relation between effort and reward. As we shall see later, to maintain that workers' struggles are in fact economistic is not to insist that they are thereby limited. Yet at the same time it has to be recognised that the relation between workers' economistic demands and a wider political consciousness is a contradictory, explosive, dynamic one rather than a smooth progression (as implied by Thompson p6). Richard Hyman expresses the nature of this relationship clearly in his introduction to Goodrich's book, which also recognises the primarily defensive nature of worker activity:

"(Goodrich) makes clear that the forms of workers' control then in evidence were typically reactive or protective in intent, a means to defend specific material interests rather than an assertion of the principle of industrial



democracy as an end in itself. He shows that the boundary between workers' control as a means and as an end is by no means inflexible; actions and strategies which are primarily defensive may spill over into demands for positive control over the direction of industry..." (viii, Goodrich, 1975).

It becomes important, then, in understanding the nature and dynamic of worker resistance, to examine its roots in what we have argued are economic issues, and their articulation with the non-economic, rather than embracing the whole area in the inherently ambiguous category of "control". In order to explore some of these articulations, therefore, we now take a step into what may be called the "real world" as documented in a number of sociological and industrial relations case studies.

### 3 The Real World

To go down into "the real world" is to ask what the kind of "control" struggles amply referred to, but not often empirically documented in the labour process literature, are actually about. We have already referred (chapter 2) to the unfortunate division which seems to exist in the study of work between "labour process" and "industrial relations" approaches, in that the latter, which might be expected to engage with the nature and content of shop floor struggles which reflect "collective bargaining" issues, does not appear to be drawn on to substantiate the theoretical work of the former. (Interestingly, the relationship does appear to work the other way; industrial relations, as well as organisational theory, appear to have been extensively influenced over the last few years by radical labour process approaches centring on "control").

Much recent work in the industrial relations field has been preoccupied with the effects of recession and political change on levels of shop steward organisation, a focus which in its turn reflects the overall concern with

shop steward/member and shop steward/management relations in terms of the measurement of power. A recent study which usefully (and, as we have suggested, unusually) combines labour process and industrial relations approaches, Edwards and Scullion's The Social Organisation of Industrial Conflict (1982) also seeks to establish levels of conflict and the degrees of "control" surrounding these rather than setting out to assess the content of such conflict. Nevertheless, because it provides a wide range of examples perhaps even more detailed than those of other recent industrial relations contributions, the study provides some useful empirical material for exploring the nature and content of worker resistance. We therefore begin our survey of the "real world of workers" with this book.

The Social Organisation of Industrial Conflict is a study of five plants within two industries, engineering and clothing, in the context of which a number of examples of industrial relations "problems" such as turnover, absenteeism, the effort bargain and job allocation are examined. Again inviting comparison with the real world, few of these forms of worker/management interaction appeared to develop into dramatic instances of industrial conflict. Following Goodrich, we can perhaps distinguish between a "negative" avoidance of managerial structures of efficiency on the one hand and a "positive" assertion of workers' needs and interests on the other. However, the difference between this and an "authority"-related perspective is that in the examples given both sets of responses represented positions on a spectrum of effort and reward. This "time and money" context for a range of levels of worker response and resistance is illustrated clearly, first of all, in the example of "early leaving".

This problem was at its most apparent in one of the engineering plants, the Large Metals Factory, which had the strongest tradition of workplace organisation and in which there had recently been a switch from piecework to measured day work. In Edwards and Scullion's words: "Put crudely, a shift to day work had removed any incentive to work harder, and workers now sought increased leisure instead" (Edwards and Scullion, 1982, 137).

The point about a shift towards effort (or restriction of it) from reward within the effort bargain is made at many other points in the analysis. What emerges most clearly in this example is that while early leaving as an activity was clearly a kind of worker behaviour which management found problematic, it was not seen by the workers concerned as part of a "spearhead" of invasion into managerial prerogatives. Rather it was simply a spontaneous response to the detachment of reward from effort, combined with obvious aversion to the work itself and the logical position that "as several pointed out, they had done their work and management had no reason to keep them in the plant" (p138). The actual point of conflict related to management's attack on the practice, which was resisted as constituting a threat to organisational strengths and rights which had been built up by the workers over the years as an essential defence of their interests. Significantly, even this was not taken up as a point of principle in a vacuum, in which, clearly, it could have no pertinence, but in the context of a dispute about overtime.

This dispute, within the Large Metals Factory, began when a foreman discovered that only two of a group of four welders who were supposed to be doing overtime were present. He threatened to stop the pay of the two absent workers, at which the two who were in the shop walked out. The immediate problem was settled through the convenor agreeing to in future formally submit a list of names of those doing overtime. However, the issue resurfaced shortly afterwards when management took the initiative of demanding clocking out at the end of the Saturday morning overtime period. The convenors saw this as an attack on long-established customary rights and immediately called an overtime ban, which surprised management with the extent of its support.

The point here is that this dispute was not about "control" in terms of a rebellion by the workforce expressed through leaving early in or out of overtime periods, but about the realities of effort and production. The

customary practices built up by the workers and stewards were not defended simply as positions won in the battle over control, but as representing material advances in the terms for the sale of labour power. The achievement of such advances, such as regular overtime, was located by the shop stewards in the context of a more realistic approach to production which would take account of workers' interests: "If managers wanted production the best way to get it was to try to co-operate with the shop floor on the basis of customary understandings" (p140). This simultaneous acceptance of and undermining of managerial perspectives illustrates a centrally important feature of worker response which will be more closely examined below under Edwards and Scullion's heading of "non-directed conflict".

While, therefore, "early leaving" might appear to be a prime example of "control"-centred resistance to managerial discipline and the alienation of labour, a closer examination reveals the articulation of effort and reward issues fundamental to the organisation and corresponding impact of the labour process. In this case the dynamic was in terms of the relation of reward to effort rather than the reverse. Management had done away with piecework in order to combat earnings drift; the workforce, in response, developed a strategy of enhancing their earnings through what were usually "false" levels of overtime. This involved a self-organisation of the labour process by the workforce which included estimating the amount of labour time necessary "for production", in other words, for the firm to produce and compete realistically in terms of the prevailing social average. At the same time an "incentive" for accepting what were in fact restricted earnings opportunities was imposed at a "custom-and-practice" level in terms of worker-imposed absenteeism which on the one hand afforded the workforce increased leisure time and on the other took into account the "necessary" production levels referred to above. It should be noted that the workers' opting-out in terms of hours did not necessarily have implications for

their levels of effort while actually at the workplace, although Edwards and Scullion imply that these, too, were vitiated by a general lack of satisfaction itself connected with the drastic decline in earnings suffered by the workforce: "...workers had long-standing grievances about wages and what they saw as general managerial incompetence, and the current situation merely increased these feelings. Workers felt disgruntled and plodded through their work tasks, looking for reasons to stop work whereas normally they were eager to finish as quickly as possible (under piecework)" (p142).

The apparently futile attempt by management in this factory to shift the balance of the effort-reward relationship points to some of the contradictions between worker interests and managerial objectives which clearly undermine any lasting attempt to attain a satisfactory effort "bargain". In the components factory belonging to Company A of the study, for example, while the "reward" end of the spectrum was comparatively stable, given the small proportion of total earnings represented by the bonus and the stewards' sense that they had won a useful series of recent victories on the issue of earnings, it was the problem of incentive in relation to effort which was now becoming the main concern of management:

"Managers in Company A were concerned not about the usual problem of piecework such as a drift away from standards and the growth of leap-frogging claims by militant stewards but about the problem of motivation. With the gradual rise in day work rates as a proportion of average earnings it was felt that the incentive element had been lost" (p181). And it was in terms of this overriding concern about production on the part of senior management that the uneasy balance that had so far been attained between effort and reward was, the authors feel, in imminent danger of being upset:

"....senior managers, who are more concerned than were shop managers with labour costs and profitability...may then act to alter the system, which may well set off a cycle of renewed shopfloor-level conflict".

A similar process was, in fact, developing in the much less well organised Underwear Factory in which the "simple and direct control which was based on the absolute rights of management to manage, was felt by a self-consciously modernising management to give insufficiently precise control over piece-rates on particular jobs and was being replaced by a more 'rational' system. This system might be expected to bring conflict more into the open as the process of rate-fixing becomes more open to negotiation" (p196). E&S note that "the case exemplifies the point made earlier that any system of control tends to create problems for those managers most directly concerned with costs, efficiency, and the consistency of application of the payment system. Reforms may well give a new impetus to immediate conflict at shopfloor level" (p197).

The point illustrated in this, as in the previous example, is that management's inability to "leave well alone", to permit an indulgency pattern which would allow relatively conflict-free relations in the factory, is fuelled centrally by pressures of cost and efficiency. Similarly, the "cycle of conflict" which Edwards and Scullion accurately describe as renewed by such "corrective" action, while no doubt fuelled by workers' irritation at ensuing new forms of managerial oppression, in practice centres on the economic areas where such different sets of interests clash head-on, rather than on the underlying resentment itself. Such interactions are again illustrated in the final example from Edwards and Scullion's study, the dispute in the Small Metals Factory.

A series of problems started in this factory when a worker was taken "off the clock" for refusing to move to another job. This was seen by the stewards as a provocative managerial action since job mobility was customarily subject to shop steward agreement. In fact higher management did not approve of the action, but stuck by it, as in the above example, as part of their "broad aim of rationalising relationships" (p240).

The dispute then took on a different dimension, in that management became concerned at the frequency of shop steward meetings called to discuss these and other problems. The effect on production was particularly acute in the inspection department, where the original "off the clock" episode had occurred, as here workers had banned all mobility of labour as a protest, thus no longer providing the usual cover for the steward. As a result, management decided to stop the inspection shop steward's pay for any time that he was absent from his section, and in response the whole shop stewards' committee left the plant and invited management to stop their pay. However, management did not take up this opportunity to start a strike, and the stewards were at this point equally reluctant to escalate the dispute. The push into more drastic sanctions came from a decision by management to cut down overtime levels, thus overriding an "overtime buffer" which had been fought for and secured by the stewards a few years previously to protect workers against the continuous threat of short time working. The decision was thus seen by both stewards and workers as a conscious attempt by management to pile on pressure, and they responded with a total overtime ban and, after considering and rejecting other sanctions, a policy of "working to the hour".

In this example, then, also, the crux of the dispute seemed to revolve around an attempt by management to "pull back" the organisation of the labour process into some sort of shape conforming to their criteria of efficiency, while workers' defence of their own interests both disrupts

this objective and constructs forms of organisation which, if challenged by management, respond with strong defensive action. Thus workers both resist attacks by management on the "status quo" they have built up, and build up this status quo through an ongoing war of attrition which directly reflects their class interests as workers. The contradictions for management's own objectives which emerged through this "reactivation" of conflict, and their outcome in an unofficial policy of "firefighting", crop up also in my own case studies and are examined in more detail there.

A clear picture emerges in the analysis as a whole (despite its somewhat divergent theoretical objectives) of conflict as structured along dimensions of effort and reward, whatever the immediate cause or underlying antagonism involved. The demand for output on the managerial side and the corresponding necessity to defend standards of living on the part of those selling their labour power constitute an irreducible framework in terms of which conflict, whatever its more "humanistic" or "political" aspects, is as it were forced into expression. That this takes place whatever the ideology or conscious motive of those involved is demonstrated in the firmly production-orientated outlook of the shop stewards in Edwards and Scullion's study (see page 13) whose own actions in defence of their membership nevertheless undermined precisely those objectives. This contradictory and inconsistent relation between action and consciousness is one which we explore in more detail below. Meanwhile, some of the more qualitative and subjective studies which have appeared over the last few years will now be surveyed in order to supplement our "evidence" as to the actual concerns of workers.

### Experiential Evidence

Such "observer-participation" treatments as Ruth Cavendish's Women On The Line, Anna Pollert's Girls, Wives, Factory Lives (Pollert, 1981) and Sallie Westwood's All Day Every Day (1984) (the principal three to be considered



here, though other studies will be referred to) provide us with a vivid picture of the subjective experience of routine semi-skilled work which might be expected to emphasise aspects such as boredom or "alienation" (in the sense in which it is misconceived by Robert Blauner). Nevertheless, while such features do emerge, the overwhelming impression once again is one of the remorseless twin pressures of effort and reward. The message of such descriptions of factory life under the real subordination of labour is that issues of and aspirations towards "control" are, simply, irrelevant to such workers' experience. Not only may workers in these circumstances not particularly want to think about "control", they also, quite literally, can't; there is neither the time nor the opportunity. The question, in conditions of atomised, routinised, pre-structured labour, simply does not arise.

We shall now attempt to classify the experience of the workers portrayed in these studies under some of the same headings as were used in the previous chapter to analyse real subordination of labour, ie abstraction, intensification, exploitation etc.

(i) Abstraction of Labour as shown in the case-studies

In Women On the Line, describing the intense pressure of timed work patterns on the "girls", Ruth Cavendish writes:

"Differences between the jobs were minor in comparison with the speed and discipline which the line imposed on us all." Earlier, more positively, she has described jobs which were part of an assembly-line "chain" as "like being one large collective worker" (Cavendish, 1982, p41). More explicitly and more generally, but still in direct relation to the workers she studied in Girls, Wives, Factory Lives, Anna Pollert makes the same point:

"The women at Churchmans, as in factories all over the world, were producing commodities. They happened to be handling tobacco - but life would have been much the same had they been making chocolate mints, cardboard boxes, or silicon chips. For work was essentially unskilled, boring, repetitive, alienated - something to be endured for the sake of the wage packet at the end. And to this extent meaningless work, work for profit, feels the same whether it is done by a man or a woman" (Pollert, 1981, p75).

Pollert herself related this "commodified" structuring of labour directly to its parallel expression for the worker in terms of viewing his or her own labour power as a commodity: (Quote from Joey in Paul Willis' Learning to Labour) "It's just a fucking way of earning money. There's that many ways to do it...Jobs all achieve the same, they make you money, nobody does a job for the love of a job" (p75).

The view of labour as an undifferentiated, "fluid" substance, the actual content of which is irrelevant in terms of the firm's objectives, is powerfully confirmed in Pollert's lucid uncovering of the rationale behind Churchman's job evaluation scheme, the alleged "scientific objectivity" of which in fact represented little more than a sophisticated device for the cheapening of labour power. Thus when "With the impressive respectability of numbers, judgements of value are translated into judgements of quantity" (p67), such concrete differences as exist between jobs disappear before the imperative of "grading"; yet there appeared to be little difference between the value-creating capacities of tobacco workers and, say, cigar-making machine operatives that would objectively justify the placing of the former in a lower pay grade than the latter. The articulation of pay grading and labour time/output is examined more closely in the following sections. Meanwhile, however, the point has been

made that the essentially undifferentiated and thus "abstracted" nature of the work itself precluded any immediate concern by workers with control over its organisation, content and methods.

(ii) The Intensification and "technical structuring" of labour - its relation to "control".

The same pervasive pressure on workers which made more ephemeral considerations of "control" inconsequential is shown still more tellingly in the descriptions of effort levels and output targets which dominate the studies. Ruth Cavendish shows how "control" considerations were eliminated by the technical structuring of the "line":

"The women ran the line, but we were also just appendages to it. Its discipline was imposed automatically through the light, the conveyor belt and the bonus system. We just slotted in like cogs in a wheel. Every movement we made and every second of our time was controlled by the line; the chargehands and supervisors didn't have to tell us when to get on....You couldn't really oppose the organisation of the work because it operated mechanically...the supervisors' job was really done for them" (p107).

As well as demonstrating the absence of any central need for "bossing", the analysis points to the second-by-second maintenance of effort built into the labour process. This was made eminently clear by the fact that the line ran, as described above, at a pre-set speed which was in fact the "top" speed, so that it represented the maximum intensification of labour - workers simply could not work any faster: "It is impossible to put over in writing the speed of the line, the pace of work, and the fiddliness of the jobs we had to repeat all day long, as tray followed tray down the line. We were physically geared up, straining to get it done as fast as we could, and the atmosphere was frantic" (p111). The pace and pressure of the line imposed relentless restrictions in terms of time: "We couldn't do the

things you would normally not think twice about, like blowing your nose or flicking hair out of your eyes - that cost valuable seconds - it wasn't included in the layout so no time was allowed for it" (p41).

The same intense pressure on workers in terms of time and output targets is documented by Pollert: "Time and the work-study man were the masters" (61). Pollert shows how the pay grading system, examined in more detail in the next section, interacted with the production goals set by the firm to produce an exact measurement and allocation of every movement: "The (grade) dictated the exact rate for doing a job. To keep up demanded perfect 'economy' of movement; in other words, not using one nerve, muscle or limb which was not directly necessary to do the job. It meant keeping part of the body still, and turning arms, wrists, hands and fingers into a high-speed machine" (p62).

Interestingly, what Pollert calls this "minute hold of the labour process over the girls" (p61) can be compared within the study to the previous system of "normal" piecework within which a measurable "slack" in effort had been identified by management and supervision:

"It was an accepted fact that you did a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. But to the workpeople, a fair day's work was about a 70% day, the other 30% of the day was spent going forwards or backwards to breaks, or getting ready to go home or something" (supervisor) (p61).

Such quantification of effort illustrates clearly the point that the problem for management is not the translation of labour power into labour per se, but its intensification to a degree which can match the maximalist targets imposed by the requirements of profitability. The impact of this maximisation on the everyday experience of workers is reflected in the title of "The Minutes" given by the garment workers in Westwood's All Day Every Day to their measured day work system; and

the preoccupation with and corresponding pressure on workers of time is vividly illustrated in a number of descriptions of the subjective experience of work, such as Linhart's The Assembly Line ("the speed of the line dictates everything, without respite...How could I have imagined that they could have stolen one minute from me, and that this theft would cause me more pain and hurt than the most sordid of crimes?" (Linhart, 1981, p30) and Richard Pfeffer's Working for Capitalism (Pfeffer, 1979).

Ultimately, as indicated in Pollert's point above (p21) about the "economy of movement" required by the plant's new "Pay and Productivity" system, managerial requirements of profitability and the desired organisation of the labour process came together in the projection of the worker into a machine; consistent, predictable, measurable and reliable. Such a goal is reflected in management's criteria for the organisation of the labour process in terms of the maximum technically possible output, as shown in the comment of a manager quoted in Hrw Beynon's Working For Ford:

"No: I may be naive over this but I can't see that at all. Management don't set difficult work standards. All we want is maximum use of the plant....All we want then is the plant to produce the number of cars that we know it can produce - we're simply asking for good continuous effort" (HB's emphasis).

The manager uses this "objective" criterion (the number of cars the plant can produce) to measure what is described as a "reasonable" level of effort ("The unions...seem to think that increased efficiency means we're asking the men to sweat blood. We're not doing this at all. We aim to set standards that can reasonably be met") (P134). Yet the impact on the workforce is experienced in terms of the attempt to turn them into machines, reflected in the precisely calculated units of output measured by the work study department:

the preoccupation with and corresponding pressure on workers of time is vividly illustrated in a number of descriptions of the subjective experience of work, such as Linhart's The Assembly Line ("the speed of the line dictates everything, without respite...How could I have imagined that they could have stolen one minute from me, and that this theft would cause me more pain and hurt than the most sordid of crimes?" (Linhart, 1981, p30) and Richard Pfeffer's Working for Capitalism (Pfeffer, 1979).

Ultimately, as indicated in Pollert's point above (p21) about the "economy of movement" required by the plant's new "Pay and Productivity" system, managerial requirements of profitability and the desired organisation of the labour process come together in the projection of the worker into a machine; consistent, predictable, measurable and reliable. Such a goal is reflected in management's criteria for the organisation of the labour process in terms of the maximum technically possible output, as shown in the comment of a manager quoted in Huw Beynon's Working For Ford:

"No: I may be naive over this but I can't see that at all. Management don't set difficult work standards. All we want is maximum use of the plant...All we want then is the plant to produce the number of cars that we know it can produce - we're simply asking for good continuous effort" (HB's emphasis).

The manager uses this "objective" criterion (the number of cars the plant can produce) to measure what is described as a "reasonable" level of effort ("The unions...seem to think that increased efficiency means we're asking the men to sweat blood. We're not doing this at all. We aim to set standards that can reasonably be met:") (p134). Yet the impact on the workforce is experienced in terms of the attempt to turn them into machines, reflected in the precisely calculated units of output measured by the work study department:

"They say that their timings are based on what an 'average man' can do at an 'average time of the day'. That's a load of nonsense that. At the beginning of the shift it's all right but later on it gets harder...Yet you've always got the same times: Ford's times. It's this numbering again. They think that if they number us and number the job everything is fine".

"They decide on their measured day how fast we will work. They seem to forget that we're not machines you know. The standards they work to are excessive anyway. They expect you to work the 480 minutes of the eight hours you're on the clock..." (quotes from two assembly line workers) (p135).

The interaction of "work-studied" output targets, the drive towards the reduction of necessary labour time, and the corresponding relentless intensification of labour, is clear in the accounts of the everyday experience of the workers in these studies. As we argued in Chapter 2, insofar as the notion of "control" is meaningful, it is exemplified in the operation of such quantitative goals which structure both the organisation of the labour process and its impact on workers. Pollert notes that "...behind the 'friendly relations' the girls had little more freedom or control over their lives than in the days of the ironfisted boss. They did not need to be bossed, because they had their hands tied anyway...Power and decisions were somewhat 'out there', never in the factory, let alone the shop floor" (p61).

Pollert herself relates this "powerlessness" at least partly to the incorporation of the Churchman workers' union, but the lack of "control", or at least its salience as an objective for the workforce, was also clearly built into the relation between labour process and reward system for the workers. It is to this articulation between pay and effort and its integration of pay issues into the workings of the labour process that we now turn.

(iii) Time and Money - the exploitation nexus

In making the point, cited above, that the kind of strategic decision-making recommended by for example Cressey and MacInnes as a "control" strategy for workers was remote from the very conception of work at Churchman's, Pollert goes on to note that workers there were also "hamstrung at another, very immediate level" (p61) - the operation of the new payment scheme, embodying a grading structure, and its impact on the organisation and intensification of labour. Churchman's, in fact, was unique among the case studies in operating a combined system of work measurement and job evaluation rather than the more traditional piecework. The scheme, introduced in the mid-60s, was known as PPS (proficiency pay scheme). This divided jobs into four categories, each of which retained a certain level of stabilised pay related to performance, which could be varied both through "job plusages" (a form of grading) and some opportunity for "proficiency pay". Failure to attain performance was also sanctioned, however, so that "the 'stick' was in fact as important as the 'carrot' in some types of jobs" (p55).

The "performance standards" which had been set by the work study department were tightly maintained through their integration into the particular grade, supported by related sanctions. If a worker's output fell below the precise amount required over the four-week "reference period" she would be warned, then downgraded, and would receive the lower rate of pay for the whole of the next month, even if she subsequently improved. Thus in some cases the company could be receiving standard performance from a particular worker at below what had been assessed to be the price of her labour power.

What Pollert calls the "minute hold of the labour process over the girls" effectively secured by a system in which "This threat of demotion hung over every girl and secured her more tightly to her job than the strictest supervisor. It guaranteed stability of output to the company, stability of earnings to those who could keep up and stability of grading to those who



could not. This was the classic iron fist beneath the velvet glove" (p62). Again the implication of a lack of any need for an interpersonal power relationship between management and the workforce is clear.

The major point here is that of the extensive articulation between pay and the organisation of the labour process. Effort and reward are almost inextricably linked, to the extent that a definite, quantified - and maximum - amount of labour is tied in with an equally precise level of reward. Drop the effort/output below a certain level, and the reward drops too. There appears to be no escape for the worker from this treadmill.

In her chapter "Up against the Minutes" Sallie Westwood presents an equally overwhelming portrait of the unremitting pressures of time-measured payment systems on the labour process. "The minutes" was the title given by the workers to the MDW system used in the factory. As at Churchill's, the system related pay to a specified level of performance, rather than allowing a variable level of performance to determine pay as with piecework schemes. The workers were graded into seven bands linked to levels of performance; if an operator's performance fell below the level specified in her band, she would be downgraded. It was, however, still possible to earn a bonus by producing more than the given amount in the time. Workers were assessed on performance once a month at a meeting of management, supervisors and trade union representatives.

A system in which, as we have argued in Chapter 2, a profit-related and thus essentially quantified conception of efficiency meant the split-second fragmentation of jobs was monitored with equal precision by the women, often as the basis of a simmering resentment:

"I'm supposed to make a dozen tee-shirts, sides and sleeves in 10.47 minutes and produce 55 dozen a day as an A grade, and Shanta, as a star grade has to produce 50 dozen and 10 a day. It's ridiculous. Every time the minutes are given they get worse, they want more from us every time. Well, It won't work. I can't do the target" (Westwood, 1984, p51).

Thus while the pay grades remained the same, new levels of output were imposed with each new job, in what amounted to a class example of managerial rate-cutting - this time from the effort end of the spectrum. And this was in its turn clearly and angrily related by the workers to reward:

"You know...the minutes are so hard now that the company can save money. They give out such high minutes that all the girls are getting downgraded, so it's cheaper to employ them to do what an A grade used to do. It's not fair. It's not right that they should treat people like this" (p55).

The extensive articulation of effort and reward within the labour process itself, the use of a range of payment systems - bonus schemes, measured day work, "Pay and Productivity" - in the same "carrot and stick" fashion to ordain the maximum intensification of labour, would not of course be relevant or possible were it not for the central importance of pay to the workers, the integration of their very "means of life" into "the minutes" or "the bonus". Ruth Cavendish describes the direct connection between production, money and time for the workers:

"The extra or missing pennies represented directly that we'd been very hard pushed or that a hold up had affected the bonus...Money was what you were there for, and it was up to you to decide if you could afford a couple of hours off...In comparison, a monthly salary (made) the relation between time and money (seem) very obscure" (p133).

The closeness to basic subsistence of many production workers' wages is in itself a major factor in the immediacy of the effort/reward relationship. As Cavendish describes her own experience in going from a comfortable monthly salary to "wages": "The interest and emotion aroused by a few pennies and pounds may seem odd to someone who has never worked on the shopfloor...My attitude changed completely as a result of being in the same situation. The minutiae of wage settlements, bonus rates, and overtime pay were not trivial issues in the least...there was so little money that you had to make sure you

received every penny you were entitled to, because it really did count" (p131).

### CONCLUSIONS

The picture presented in the account so far may appear to be of somewhat powerless and bemused workers, unaware of the extent of their exploitation or at least unprepared to do very much about it. In fact, to take up our final point about the workers' own conceptions of the relation between pay and labour time, there appeared to be a surprising (given the impossibility of "perceiving" exploitation) degree of awareness about the difference between paid and unpaid labour time:

(Vera from Girls, Wives, Factory Lives): "Once you've done your work for your grade, that's it. What you do over, the firm has....But you can't go home, not till the buzzer goes. So you've got to sit and work for nothing" (p175).

Ruth Cavendish draws a similar distinction between "our time" and "their time": "....the fights over clocking off were of more than symbolic importance - they were real attempts by them to encroach on our time, and by us, to resist such encroachments...UMEC counted the minutes between 4.10 and 4.15 in lost UNOs" (p117).

It was resistance to the restriction of the (apparent) opportunity to "work for yourself" which had existed under piecework that pushed the women at Chuchman's into a dogged, though ultimately unsuccessful, fight against the operation of the grading structure. Similarly, the final dispute at Stitcho (the factory described in All Day, Every Day) exploded as a direct result of the workers' perception of their exploitation, triggered off by the imposition of a particularly impossible target on a batch of baby clothes: "Take the minutes. I'm not kidding, while I've been here in the last four years they've gone down and down. They get tighter and tighter and you can't get the target out...The company is swindling us by making the minutes lower and lower which means we can't get the target so we are downgraded, so they

have to pay us less to do the same amount as we were doing last year for more money" (p56).

The "explosive" nature of worker resistance and its relationship to contradiction will be considered in more detail in chapter 5. In the above arguments we have been most concerned to illustrate the articulation between labour time, pay and effort at the heart of the labour process, and the role of this interaction in effectively ordaining the requisite, or close to the requisite, levels of intensification of labour from the workforce. In the next chapter we go on to examine how this portrayal of the experience of the labour process in essentially economic terms can be used to challenge theoretical approaches which emphasise the ideological incorporation of the working class.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Political Side of Economism

The last chapter set out to demonstrate, in some detail, that the pressures on, and actions and motivations of, workers are overwhelmingly economistic in nature. But having "proved" this, it may well be asked how much further we have got. For there exists a considerable, if not dominant, body of opinion that sees economistic struggles by workers either as themselves "incorporationist", binding workers to the very system that oppresses them, or as irrelevant straws in the wind before an overriding ruling class hegemony.

Both strands of this approach have distinguished forbears. In the case of the first, Lenin, who first brought the term "economism" into prominence in the context of a polemical debate with fellow Social Democrats, places the analysis in the context of a call for revolutionary leadership. In the second, the emphasis on political and ideological "overdeterminations" as part of a critique of economic determinism can be identified with Althusser, although that author would himself ascribe much of his argument on class consciousness to the influence of Gramsci. As we shall see, the theories of Gramsci taken overall do not entirely favour this interpretation.

In this section we shall undertake a brief survey of the development, and implications for current theory, of both sets of ideas, following in the next with a critique based both on alternative theories and the actual nature of working-class resistance.

#### i) From "economism" to "instrumentalism".

The debate on economism is almost as old as its subject - activity by workers centred on the terms and conditions of employment, and the alleged limits of such activity in terms of attaining any wider socialist consciousness. The term "economism" itself stems from a debate entered into by Lenin over the alternative strategies of revolutionaries confronted

with such struggles. Since Lenin appears to have been the first theorist, socialist or otherwise, to have begun to explore the connections between "trade union" and "socialist" consciousness (in his own words, the "relation between consciousness and spontaneity") his writings are an appropriate place to begin discussion of the issue.

Lenin's critique of economism is on the surface a straightforward polemic with a contemporary tendency within the Social Democrats who, as their name suggests, favoured the path of uncritical support for workers' "purely economic" struggles. However, in taking the "economists" to task in What Is To Be Done? (Lenin, 1902) Lenin appears to go considerably beyond the relatively uncontroversial argument that socialists ought to be trying to take such struggles on to a more political level. Rather, Lenin argues that not only can trade union struggles themselves provide no opening for socialist ideas, but that they actually impose a "bourgeois politics" on the working class; that by itself the working class can only spontaneously achieve this "trade union " level of consciousness; and that it follows that only a socialist party partly made up of elements from the intelligentsia can provide the necessary socialist input into working class consciousness.

This somewhat extreme position can in some ways be modified by considering its contemporary context. It seems clear from the arguments Lenin used in WITBD that the Economists themselves took at the time an absurdly "tailist" stance; Lenin quotes them as arguing in their paper that "the economic basis of the movement is eclipsed by the effort never to forget the political idea". Further, the Economists' slogan of "The workers for the workers" reflects another stance to which Lenin was understandably opposed, namely that Social Democrats should restrict their efforts to the struggle against the Tsarist government, with resistance to capitalism itself being led by workers backed up, presumably, by "Economist" support.

This apart, however, Lenin's position that "Social-Democratic consciousness... can only be brought to the workers from without" and that the "trade union consciousness" spontaneously developed by the working class could only lead to its "becoming subordinated to bourgeois ideology" appears to exclude any connections between the material experience of workers and the meaning and relevance of socialist ideas. Brought to the workers, as Lenin emphasises, "from without", and as a "choice" which eliminates any vestige of trade union consciousness, socialism is presented as arising "side by side" with workers' struggle, rather than as rooted in or connected with it; "Each arises out of different premises" (Kautsky's words, quoted approvingly by Lenin).

As Paul Thompson has pointed out, this position has provided the basis for an "idealist formulation" of consciousness which has been extended by later writers such as Poulantzas to argue for the total domination of working class activity by bourgeois ideology. The aspect of Lenin's argument in WITBD which allows such reification of working class consciousness is the dichotomy drawn between the character of working class activity in response to material conditions and a socialist analysis which can locate these conditions in a general critique of capitalism. At this point in Lenin's argument there is no conception of any dialectical connection between "spontaneous" responses to the reality of exploitation and the triggering of revolutionary consciousness - a relationship which Lenin himself finally acknowledged, as we see below, in the light of his own experience of the 1905 and 1917 revolutions.

It may seem a long way from Lenin and pre-revolutionary Russia to the more prosaic pastures of Luton and the attempt by the British sociologists Goldthorpe, Lockwood et al to debunk the myth of "embourgeoisment" which had grown up in the wake of the much-vaunted "affluence" of the 50s and early 60s. Nevertheless, Goldthorpe and Lockwood's conclusions reflect many of the same preoccupations and, despite their praiseworthy dissection of earlier sociological complacencies, some of the same somewhat static and mechanistic

assumptions as Lenin's argument.

Like Lenin, Goldthorpe and Lockwood (Goldthorpe, Lockwood et al, The Affluent Worker, 1968) confront the reality of "economistic" or in their terms "instrumental" activity by workers; like Lenin they refuse to admit the possibility of any relationship between such activity and the projection into political awareness. In Goldthorpe and Lockwood's case, what they were faced with was a working class very different, admittedly, from that of Lenin's Russia; a working class worn down by several decades of disillusionment and also newly provided with a comparatively comfortable standard of living. Nevertheless, while the question of revolution was clearly not on the agenda, Goldthorpe and Lockwood's analysis reflects in miniature, as it were, many of the restrictions built into the argument of What Is To Be Done?

Thus, in the identification of a "new", privatised stratum of the working class, and the contrast between this and the "traditional" and "solidaristic" working class of the older industrial regions, Goldthorpe and Lockwood can be argued to throw out the baby with the theoretical bathwater. These new privatised workers lacked the "solidary" bonds and trade union idealism of their older traditional forbears - ergo, preoccupied as they were with home fittings and consumer durables, they were no longer suitable revolutionary or even strike material. Similarly, the authors' research policy of letting the workers' own attitudes largely define the situation being looked at misfires on their one-dimensional and mechanistic interpretations of "(work)mates are not friends" statements and those forswearing traditional union loyalties. Lacking in "solidary"-ness, the Luton workers must also be incapable of solidarity; cynicism about the union is taken as precluding any significance to the workers of their own shop-floor organisation.

As Robin Blackburn puts it in his critique of Goldthorpe and Lockwood in The Incompatibles (Blackburn and Cockburn, 1967), "Rarely can a sociological study such as this have been so cruelly put to the test" (p48).



Scarcely a month after the publication of The Affluent Worker, in October 1966, a massive strike involving "near riot conditions" broke out at Vauxhall's. But even if events had not dealt such a resounding raspberry to Goldthorpe and Lockwood's conclusions, the implications of their analysis would still demand investigation in relation to broader theories of class consciousness.

In fact the assumptions behind Goldthorpe and Lockwood's almost reproving allegation of the lack of "true" trade unionism at Vauxhall's are clearly brought out in much of the work on class consciousness which followed in the wake of "The Affluent Worker". The useful body of work coming under the heading of "workers' images of society" will be examined in more detail in the next section, but some of the more mainstream industrial/political theorising carried out by for example Mann and Giddens is relevant in this context.

As Moorhouse points out in his critique of these two writers (Moorhouse, 1976) the three-fold "classification" of class consciousness provided by Goldthorpe in a concluding paper to the Affluent Worker study bears remarkable similarities to those of Giddens (1973) and Mann (1970). While, for Goldthorpe, class consciousness requires

- (i) an awareness of similar situations and interests
- (ii) a definition of these interests as in fundamental conflict with those of another class, and
- (iii) a conception of class as permeating the totality of existing social relations and as crucially determining the future social order,

Giddens and Mann ask for, respectively, class identity, conflict consciousness and revolutionary consciousness, and class identity, class opposition, class totality and "an alternative".

Such three- or four- fold categorisations of the "conditions" for class

consciousness appear to present a model of such awareness as existing, as it were, "on high" - at a pinnacle of ideological purity towards which only the most determined and purposive workers can hope to reach. Any notion of a wider consciousness as attainable in terms of a relationship with action is absent from this sterile perspective, which isolates "class consciousness" as a desideratum on an entirely separate plane from that of workers' own humdrum and everyday struggles.

Despite its rigidity, however, the unquestioning dismissal of "instrumental" or "economistic" activity continues to influence current thinking on class and industrial issues. While the theoretical preoccupation with "class consciousness" as such appears to have died out in the '70s, more recent debates, mainly on the left, concerning the political status and direction of the labour movement, continue to project a disparaging dismissal of "labourism". In contributions within this tendency such as those of Hobsbawm (1983) and Hall (1983), however, the influences of "Western Marxism" are also strongly apparent, so that the theoretical circle between Lenin and Althusser is now complete.

## ii) Althusser - The Charmed Circle

Althusser's work, while pioneering in many respects, can be placed in the historical context of a reaction against the economic determinism and mechanistic Marxism embodied in Stalinist regimes. Similarly, a reaction against what was seen as the "economic determinism" of Leninist conceptions of class consciousness became part of the armoury of British Marxists in their search for explanations of working class acquiescence; and this resurrection of the ideological and political as of equal weight with the economic in the determination of class consciousness has drawn much of its theoretical sustenance from the work of Althusser. Although Althusser's theories are too complex to be adequately explored here, those of most relevance to our own concerns can now be briefly summarised.

For Althusser, interpretations of Marx, particularly in relation to the experience of Stalinism and the consequent crisis of the left, were dominated by two opposing errors; on the one hand the economism/Stalinism tradition to which the "New Left" in Britain was also opposed, but on the other the "humanism" and emphasis on the early writings of Marx which many of that grouping embraced as a response. In fact, to Althusser, Stalinism was itself a combination of economism and humanism.

In response to these errors Althusser emphasises, firstly, the relations between base and superstructure, and the internal character of these relations, and second, the abstraction of certain examples of these relations from the social formation as a whole as "instances" - instances of, for example, the relation between the economic and the political, the ideological and the juridical. One reason for this is to make the point that the social formation cannot be analysed as one irreducible whole, in terms of humanism, economism or any other variant of Marxism; rather, the various conjunctures within the social formation have to be "thought" or conceptualised with the aid of all the Marxist tools of analysis available to us. In other words, society is a "complex unity" each aspect of which has to be understood rather than simply invoking the automatic application of a determinist mode of analysis seen as "explaining" society en bloc. For our purposes, however, the most relevant aspect of this argument is its presentation of ideology as, far from a mere superstructural abstraction, an irreducible, even material element in society. As Richard Johnson puts in in his article (Johnson, 1979) "Three Problematics: elements of a theory of working-class culture", in which he compares orthodox Marxism, "culture" theory and althusserian structuralism: "Ideology is so far from being dispensable that it is the medium in which people, in all societies, live their conditions of existence, experience their world". Ideology, a super-structural factor, reflects itself in, reinforces, and most importantly reproduces the base.

This total integration of capitalist ideology with capitalist society, this overwhelming dominance, again calls forth pessimistic conclusions on class consciousness. If workers are faced on the one hand with an economic base which has as its essential condition their exploitation, and on the other with, equal essential to the continuation and reproduction of that system, superstructural factors such as ideology, politics, the law, what route exists for them to escape such a system? The answer perhaps could be, as Johnson points out, though even for Althusser this does not always follow, that "ideology is an important and necessary site of political struggles; that there is, indeed a class struggle in ideology" (p226).

This point has indeed been taken up by more recent theorists, for example in the labour process debate, to support their argument that ideology pervades all levels of struggle, right down to the point of production; that it is, at this level, of equal weight with economic considerations in working out the "effort bargain"; that, contrary to earlier arguments, the capital/labour relation can never be seen as a naked "cash-nexus". Michael Burawoy has perhaps taken this argument furthest within the labour process debate with his insistence that "any work context involves an economic dimension (production of things) a political dimension (production of social relations) and an ideological dimension (production of an experience of those relations" (Burawoy, 1979, p16). The ideological and political are thus integrated into production itself. Some of the implications of this and the Althusserian analysis as a whole, in terms of a charmed circle from which workers cannot hope to break, are examined in more detail in the next section. Finally, however, we turn to another theoretician who has enthusiastically, if posthumously, been adopted by "Western Marxists" - Antonio Gramsci.

The Althusserian concept of "relative autonomy", which is used to challenge the alleged Marxist crudity that the base "determines" the superstructure, is seen as finding a clear parallel in Gramsci's theory of state hegemony.

In noting the cultural, ideological and political complexities of "civil society" as interposing between economic causes and political effects, Gramsci was central in challenging the mechanistic Marxism then emerging within the Second International. The countervailing emphasis on the need to penetrate the consensual hegemonic formation with socialist ideas appears to lend powerful support to the Althusserian emphasis on the superstructural.

However, as we shall see below, Gramsci was able to grasp in a far more complex and subtle way than the Althusserians the contradictory relationships between economic struggles and ideological restrictions. To concentrate, in recognising the importance of ideology, almost entirely on its implications in terms of totality, while at the same time depicting the economic base exclusively in terms of "determination", is to overlook the crucial role of economic factors in both expressing the contradictions inherent in the base and, through this very process, continually undermining the superstructure. These aspects of contradiction, of dynamism, and of the dialectic are explored in our next section.

### Underminings

#### (i) The "Gap".

We begin this section, perhaps oddly, by looking at an absence; at what working class consciousness is not about. We have already discussed what worker resistance is about (making a living) and to some extent what it is not about (job content, the alienation of labour, capitalist relations of production as such). Here we want to observe a "gap" which has been noted in what were called, in the studies (mainly of the '70s) which tried to explore such issues, "workers' images of society".

The burden of many such studies, few of them sympathetic to the cause of the working class, has been to show that, beyond the most immediate daily experiences, the grasp of "the powerless" on general social issues is not only vague but frequently internally inconsistent, both between different issues and on the same issue from one sentence to the next. These findings are duplicated in study after study, including Howard Newby's survey of attitudes to class among farm workers, (Newby, 1977), Howard Davis' comparative study of craft, steel and clerical workers, (Davis, 1978) and many of the articles in the Bulmer collection, Working Class Images of Society (Bulmer, 1975).

Perhaps the clearest summary of this theme is Michael Mann's article on "The Social Cohesion of Liberal Democracies" (Mann, 1970) in which Mann uses the results of surveys on workers' attitudes to argue that the overall response of the working class to the objective injustices and inequalities of society is one of "pragmatic acceptance". Mann argues that, rather than positively conforming to ruling-class values in the way that previous studies have argued that they must do to consent, workers are in fact indifferent to most such values (such as "social justice", "democracy", "peace"), which are seen as irrelevant to the details of their everyday lives. Thus, rather than an enthusiastic "value consensus" integrating beliefs about the individuals' own positions with their attitudes to more general social issues, what was revealed were "schizophrenic" inconsistencies between the answers to questions or statements like "Do you approve of Medicare?" and "We should rely more on individual initiative ...and not so much on government welfare programmes" ( the "concrete" question normally being answered in the affirmative while the general statement was disagreed with by the same respondent).

This frequently-revealed "gap" between what are possibly radical views on the individual's own circumstances and what are much more likely to be conservative on more abstract issues combine to produce a situation in

which, as Richard Hoggart has graphically described it, "When people feel that they cannot do much about the main elements in their situation... they adopt attitudes towards that situation which allow them to have a liveable life under its shadow, a life without a constant sense of the larger situation" (Hoggart, 1958, p92). A contrast is thus presented between the workers' "pragmatic acceptance" of their own situation and their alternate neglect of, or conservative or inconsistent views on, larger issues.

This "absence", this lack of a coherent integration of ruling-class ideology into the practical experience of the worker, has its parallel within the labour process in the absence of any positive acceptance of managerial ideology as the basis for worker acquiescence. Thus the need to work ("you have got to work....really a man works because he knows in his own heart that he has got to work, it is a case of having to do it" (Nichols and Beynon, 1977, p134) is fatalistically acknowledged as part of the bargain struck with capital, a humdrum necessity characterised by Marx as "the dull compulsion of labour".

In this sense, the industrial worker within advanced capitalism occupies a place within a structure which presents itself as given. The objective position of most workers is not such that they can readily take an overview of the structures and strategies of capitalism. While capitalists can initiate, anticipate and to a certain degree plan their production and investment strategies, the view of labour is of necessity both narrow and short-term. Such a perspective is culturally as well as economically constructed, as is shown by writers like Hoggart and Paul Willis (in his illuminating analysis of the opposition of workers to "theory"). But from both points of view we have the opposite of the vigorous and explicit "class struggle" by workers against the relations of production per se propounded by many of the labour process writers discussed above; or, indeed, the equally coherent endorsement of ruling-class ideology evoked in theories of "consent".

The differing conceptual "universe" of labour from that of the ruling class is forcefully described in the analysis of workers' response to multinational capital put forward by Haworth and Ramsey in "Workers of the World Untied!" (Haworth and Ramsey, 1985). Under the heading, "Labour and International Capital: A Different Departure" they argue, "There seems no good reason for presupposing that the universe of action and associated organisational principles for a multinational management, and those for collective labour, are the same or even similar (p8)". Developing this argument through an interesting analysis of the relationship between abstract and concrete labour, the position of the employer is seen as approximating far more closely to the abstract imperatives of profitability than that of the worker tied to concrete labour: "For management purposes, the task is to arrange and secure the input of labour as a resource, adjusting sourcing and control strategies to minimise the cost per unit of production. This view of labour as calculative, objectified, impersonal aggregates is likely to become more dominant as the enterprise grows..." (p11).

Such a perspective, particularly in its implications for the growth of multinational and finance capital, "entails a further distancing of the logic of multi-national company activity designed to maximise its return from the traditional terrain comprehended by labour in terms of the wages, conditions, productivity or profitability of a single plant...In this sense, labour and capital in MNCs are not even fighting in the same dimension - but since the initiative is capital's, labour's counter blows simply find no tangible opponent on which to land" (p11).

Haworth and Ramsey's argument, while displaying a refreshing, and productive, appreciation of current industrial realities, nevertheless must be seen as perhaps over-emphasising the "powerlessness" end of the spectrum of capital-labour relations. Yet the absence of a coherent world view on the part of workers, involving as it does a non-acceptance, in practice, of ruling-class views of how the world works, is not without its own subversive or even



The same element of fear, on a more "micro", shopfloor level, is shown by Pollert to dissipate the incipient resistance and solidarity among the workers in her case study: "...they were stuck in a rut of fear - fear of lack of backing from the union, fear of lack of support from each other. The shop-floor was fragmented by mistrust and individualism, in spite of the importance of personal friendship and 'mucking in'" (Pollert, 1981, p181). At the basis of this fear, as Pollert shows clearly, were the uncertainties attached to the grading system, carrying with them the constant fear of being downgraded, so that "Insecurity about proficiency performance standards had turned some women into compulsive workers" (p182).

Linhart locates the same element of fear in the physical structure of the labour process itself: "Fear oozes out of the factory because the factory, at the most elementary, obvious level, constantly threatens the men it uses. When there's no boss in sight, and we forget the informers, it's the cars that are watching us through their measured progress, our own tools that are threatening us at the slightest inattention, the gears on the line that are calling us to order in brutal fashion. The dictatorship of the owners is exercised here in the first place by the all-powerfulness of the objects" (Linhart, 1978, p65).

However, despite the pressure on time, and despite the fear, Linhart does distinguish the beginnings of resistance, which for him reside not only in the type of row caused by the chopping off of a minute from the break, but also in "Attitudes, too. Holding yourself straight. Taking as much care as possible with your clothes". Linhart sees the cloakroom as an important centre of this fundamental resistance; here workers transformed themselves from the drab humiliation of their image in the factory into smart, immaculate presences for whom there is "the hope of being called 'mister'." Subjective though this form of response may seem, for Linhart "It's here, in these minute signs of resistance that I observe every day, more than in

political analysis, that I find real reasons for hope. At the worst moments of exasperation there's still a vague, almost unconscious, certainty that there's a subterranean power quite near, and one day it will break out" (p67-68).

It is this "subterranean power", and the channels through which it does break out, which we now propose to examine.

(ii) A Model for Class Consciousness?

In criticising, as above, the straightforward identification of worker "acquiescence" with acceptance of managerial legitimacy and/or ruling-class ideology, we have attempted to indicate the other side of the coin to this "non-acceptance"; the rooting of resistance in economic struggles which themselves are untrammelled by any ideological preconceptions. The insistence, instigated by Althusser and fellow "Western Marxist" writers, and propounded most emphatically within the labour process debate by Burawoy, that ideological and political structures must be seen as "overdetermining" or integrated into the economic base, specifically denies the potential afforded by the "absence" of ideology for such struggles, which, when they are considered at all, are seen as embodying an inherent incorporationism or "consent". However, to regard any separation between base and (ruling) superstructure as invoking a crude determinist model in which the economic base shapes existing institutions is to ignore the whole undermining role of contradictions at the base and their expression in the economic activity of workers.

This emphasis on the ideological itself in fact ignores some aspects relating to the roots of class consciousness which, as Johnson argues in his commentary on Althusser, should have been included. "We might expect it (Althusser's "Ideological State Apparatuses" essay) to deliver an account of the forms of class struggle in ideology: the way in which capital and the agencies of the capitalist state seek to secure the reproduction of a working

class in a form appropriate to the requirements of accumulation and the ways in which, on the basis of their own economic conditions of existence, proletarians struggle against this process" (Johnson, 1979, p219) (my italics).

In general, as was suggested earlier, such arguments overemphasise the universal hold of ideology at the expense of any recognition of the volatility and sudden changes of consciousness which can occur within the working class.

Perhaps fortunately, we can point to flaws within Althusser's own argument which reduce its force as a back-up to this "static" view of class consciousness. One example of these is the way in which the concept of "ideology" is conflated with ideological institutions such as schools and the family so that these become ideological constructs in terms of which ideology is presented as a material force. In a similar identification of representation with actuality, the reproduction of capital is presented as being carried out by ideology rather than as a set of economic relations mediated by a capitalist state which may well use ideology as one of its weapons.

Both these arguments demonstrate a perspective in which ideology is distortedly seen as a material force rather than a medium through which ideas which justify the particular material basis of a society are conveyed. As such not only does Althusser's work suffer from some basic conceptual errors; it also produces political mistakes which flow from these. In Johnson's words: "We are returned to a very familiar model of one-dimensional control in which all sense of struggle or contradiction is lost" (p222).

Interestingly, the failure of Burawoy in his turn to recognise the role of contradiction (in fact elsewhere he speaks of the "concrete co-ordination of interests" between labour and capital) is reflected in his implicit rejection of any conception of a specifically capitalist labour process. Criticising what is yet again alleged to be Braverman's theory of

the separation of conception and execution in terms of managerial domination, he writes: "Here we shall pursue a slightly different course, defining the labour process by the social relations into which men and women enter in order to produce useful things. I call these social relations between and among workers relations in production. These must be distinguished from the relations of exploitation between labour and capital. Whereas the former refer to the organisation of tasks, the latter refer to the relations through which surplus is pumped out of the direct producer" (Burawoy, 1985, p13).

In this way a separation is invoked in which "relations of exploitation" as part of the overall relations of production, become what is politically specific to the capitalist mode of production and thus, as political relations, require "reproducing" within the labour process itself: "... we refer not to the capitalist labour process but to the labour process in capitalist society. Once a notion of the labour process as the unity/ separation of conception and execution is replaced with a relational notion, the emphasis shifts from a question of domination to one of reproducing social relations" (p14).

What is not apparent here is that, rather than politics and ideology being integrated into the labour process under capitalism, the "imperatives" of capitalism itself (profitability, competitiveness, accumulation) are integrated into and structure the production process. There is no separation, such as Burawoy imagines, between relations of and relations in production; the first, as we tried to show when examining "control" chapter 2, constructs the second. In this way, production of surplus value (whether "obscured" or otherwise) is the pivot around which managerial constraints and working-class resistance revolve.

To present relations within the capitalist labour process centrally in terms of overt political processes is to allow no scope for the conception of any relationship between the actual economistic resistance which exists

within the labour process and a challenge to just those overall relations of production which are placed foremost on the agenda by Burawoy and other writers. Rather, political awareness or "class consciousness" is left as something which will emerge, Athene-like, from the heads of workers who suddenly apprehend (perhaps guided by intellectuals) that what they have been "reproducing" all this time is not the firm's product, but the relations of production. Such an ultimately mechanistic view of consciousness is rooted in its turn in a failure to perceive the nature of the interaction between superstructure and base.

A similar view of the possibility, or necessity, of workers somehow achieving a fully-fledged "class consciousness" is effectively dissected by Moorehouse in his critique, referred to above, of the "typologies" of Goldthorpe and Lockwood, Giddens and Mann. As he remarks: "The first point to make about all these elegant constructions is the emphasis put on intellectual understanding as an apparently necessary precondition for all radical action. Secondly, it should be noted that they seem to assume that all, and certainly a majority, of the working class should attain 'revolutionary consciousness' or 'grasp the alternatives' before any radical action is possible" (Moorhouse, 1976, p471).

And yet, as Moorhouse shows in his own survey of participants in a rent strike, radical attitudes often exist amongst workers at, so to speak, a "subliminal", disjointed and fragmented level, activated and fuelled by struggles which arise spontaneously out of the material pressures which force workers to take action. The relationship between consciousness and action is, then, clearly an interactive or dialectical one in which practice or experience forms "theory" and vice versa - the unity to which Gramsci gave the name "praxis".

And what is it that begins this process, that provides the catalyst which may force workers, if only for a time, out of their "pragmatic acceptance"

and at least raise the question of a challenge to the existing structure?

Over and over, both in major events of history and the small-scale

"subterranean" unrest of the capitalist labour process, class struggles

have been shown to "explode" out of, to be triggered by, the contradictions within capitalism which have their daily material impact on workers' lives.

For vivid illustration of this point we need look no further than our two

sources on "economism" or "instrumentalism" referred to above, both of which

were forced to at least partially eat their words by events which followed

their deliberations. In the case of Goldthorpe and Lockwood, as we have

seen, practical refutation came hard on the heels of their dismissal of

"solidarity" for Vauxhall's car workers, in the shape of an all-out strike

and "riot" over the 20% reduction in wages caused by a four-day week. This,

combined with profit figures which had recently been issued showing General

Motors well ahead of Ford and "BMC", spurred the two thousand strong workforce

into "scenes...with men singing 'The Red Flag' and calling 'String him up'

whenever a director's name was mentioned" which "made yesterday's demonstration

outside the executive offices seem mild" according to the contemporary Times

report.

Two important features emerge from an event such as this; its "explosive"

character, and the emergence of underlying hostility against management and

"profits" which without a specific trigger relating to immediate problems

of making a living will tend to remain dormant. Mann, indeed, has recognised

this "explosiveness" point without allowing it its full implications in terms

of an expression of underlying contradictions which may take the ensuing

struggle beyond its immediate cause. To the credit of Goldthorpe and Lockwood,

"real events" did cause them to reconsider their original conclusions; as

Westergaard (1970) comments, the study's "insufficient sensitivity to the

contradictions of working class consciousness, and especially to the nature

of the latent potential for change suggested by those contradictions" (1973)

gives way to "a recognition by the authors of just such an uncertainty, just

such contradictions, in the prospects for the future" (131) in their third, post-strike "Luton monograph". At the same time Westergaard notes critically "the assumption - maintained from the earlier reports of the study - that production relations, the worker's employment situation, are unlikely to be a source of social tension or to engender more than localised and 'instrumentally' directed conflict" (p132).

Any such assumption was, of course, rather more spectacularly refuted by the 1905 wave of strikes and unsuccessful revolutionary uprisings a few years after the publication of What Is To Be Done. Lenin himself wrote in response to this corollary of "economistic" struggles:

"One is struck by the amazingly rapid shift of the movement from the purely economic to the political ground, by the tremendous solidarity and energy displayed by hundreds and thousands of proletarians - and all this, notwithstanding the fact that conscious Social Democratic influence is lacking or is but slightly evident" (Lenin, 1962, 92-3).

Later, on the eve of the 1917 revolution, he developed this position still further: "A specifically proletarian weapon of struggle - the strike - was the principle means of bringing the masses into motion...Only struggle educates the exploited class...The economic struggle, the struggle for immediate and direct improvement of conditions, is alone capable of rousing the most backward strata of the exploited masses...." (Lenin, 1964, p239-42).

### (iii) Gramscian Complexities

Such concrete events, as well as theoretical considerations, can provide us, then, with a more complex view both of the relationship between economistic struggles (which as we have seen are in reality the major form of struggle of the working class) and broader political structures, and, as we see below, the cyclical interaction between grassroots spontaneity and reformism.

Few can have expressed such complexities more superlatively than Gramsci, despite the fact that his recognition of "the automatic thrust due to the

economic factor" appears to have been largely ignored by those more interested in an all-encompassing "hegemony".

Some of Gramsci's most penetrating remarks on the actual nature of working-class consciousness come in the section of the Prison Notebooks entitled "The Study of Philosophy" in which he first discusses the notion of "common sense" in a manner reminiscent of the "pragmatic acceptance" noted by our '70s sociologists. While recognising that such "philosophical" attitudes "contain an implicit invitation to resignation and patience" Gramsci nevertheless argues that "the most important point is rather the invitation to people to reflect and to realise fully that whatever happens is rational and must be confronted as such..." (Gramsci, 1971, 328).

In this way Gramsci draws a connection between workers' lack of impetuous "radicalism" and their recognition of economic reality, a point which was discussed on page 38 above. However, existing "philosophies" are shown to by no means relate unproblematically to action:

"Various philosophies or conceptions of the world exist, and one always makes a choice between them. How is this choice made? Is it merely an intellectual event, or is it something more complex? And is it not frequently the case that there is a contradiction between one's intellectual choice and one's mode of conduct? Which therefore would be the real conception of the world: that logically affirmed as an intellectual choice? or that which emerges from the real activity of each man, which is implicit in his mode of action?" (Gramsci, 1971, p326).

The "contrast between thought and action" thus argued is shown, where it occurs in "the life of great masses" to be the expression of the more fundamental contrasts, between ideology and experience, which exist within the social system itself. In this way "It signifies that the social group in question may indeed have its own conception of the world, even if only embryonic; a conception which manifests itself in action, but occasionally



and in flashes...But this same group has...adopted a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group; and it affirms this conception verbally and believes itself to be following it, because this is the conception which it follows in 'normal times' - that is when its conduct is not independent and autonomous, but submissive and subordinate" (p327).

The contrast which Gramsci draws between periods of struggle by workers (and these can be extremely "parochial", as both my own and other case studies show, yet still create this prising-away from accepted frameworks) and "normal times" is in itself illuminating. However, as a direct corollary of his recognition of the intermittent, "flashing" nature of working-class resistance and consciousness (recognised in similar terms by Anna Pollert: "Beneath the general lull in the factory, interest flashed out, then died down, just like phosphorus" (Pollert, 1981, p212), Gramsci's appreciation of the essentially contradictory nature of such consciousness is even more pertinent:

"The active man-in-the-mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity, which none-the-less involves understanding the world insofar as it transforms it. His theoretical consciousness can indeed be historically in opposition to his activity. One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit and verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed" (p323).

This point is crucial to our own argument. If it is recognised that the "practical activity" of the worker, itself fuelled by objective circumstances and as such not the product of any explicit "consciousness", can undermine and undercut those conceptions of the world imposed by the dominant hegemony, we can retain a multi-dimensional, open-ended view of class struggle in which

the experience of contradictions at the base can be seen to have the potential of pushing workers through the ideological barrier.

A practical illustration of the contradictions to which Gramsci refers is afforded by the shop stewards in the Edwards and Scullion study discussed earlier. Here, while the stewards fully accepted the managerial (and capitalist) goal of "production", their own actions in defence of their members continually undermined that goal. As the authors put it: "There was, as it were, an unconscious form of resistance whereby stewards' everyday practices challenged managerial rights in many ways even though their articulated ideology involved commitment to the same aim of producing large numbers of high-quality products" (Edwards and Scullion, 1982, p198). Thus the acceptance of managerial norms, like the agreement with broad areas of ruling class ideology, in no way implies a coherent course of action in tune with such conceptions.

### Conclusions

We have been concerned, in this chapter, to show first of all that worker resistance in the labour process is "economistic" (rather than centred on the demand for control) and secondly that such economistic action need not be dismissed as incorporationist but has dynamic, subversive and challenging implications. Such resistance, moreover, is not the result of an explicit rejection of ruling-class ideology but of the impact of contradictions which manifest themselves whatever the apparent strength of state hegemony.

In this sense we arrive at an analysis which in fact has more far-reaching "radical" implications than one relying on a fully-fledged appreciation by workers of political forms of domination, coupled with a coherent struggle for control. Were these the conditions for breaking through the existing impasse, there would indeed be grounds for the assumption which we have seen as implicit in Althusser that there is no way out, or at least none which can be initiated by workers. Rather, we have tried to point to the positive

implication of everyday working-class struggles for clearing away, even for a short time, the mystifications of ruling-class ideology.

In doing so we have emphasised contradiction, and the pressures which push workers into struggle as a result of these contradictions. However, such struggles are important not only in expressing the daily impact of the capital-labour relation on workers, but also in themselves generating forms of organisation and experience which provide an ongoing material structure for the defence of working-class interests. As Ruth Cavendish describes the aftermath of the strike at UMEC:

"The whole thing wasn't a complete failure. Our stewards were much better and eventually might have some way on the Works Committee. It gave us greater strength on the shopfloor to have more of them. People got to know each other better and we felt much closer to workers in other parts of the factory who had supported us. It marked a breakthrough in what the women ~~do~~ do...Next time, they would make sure everyone stuck it out together to the bitter end" (Cavendish, 1982, p155).

Recognising that working-class struggles might in themselves be transitory, Marx made the same point regarding the gains in terms of organisation: "Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time..The real fruit of the battle lies, not in the immediate results, but in the ever-expanding union of the workers" (Marx, 1933, p215).

This point regarding the process of struggle, in terms of its creation of working-class ideas, experience and organisation, has two important implications. The first is that battles by workers cannot and are not fought only on the ground of ideas. Organisation is a crucial dimension in the development of consciousness, and organisation cannot be built around ideas alone; it has to have some practical target, some material sanction such as the withdrawal of labour or rent.

The second point relates to what has to be recognised as the outcome of most such struggles in terms of accommodation and compromise. Working class struggles build working class organisations, and these have not traditionally been concerned to challenge the system. Yet the process of struggle, the impetus towards organisation, continue to create their own independent interpretations of the world.

This point is recognised by Richard Hyman, who, with Gramsci, characterises reformism or trade union consciousness as an essentially ambivalent response to the need by the working class to fight for, and have represented, its own interests. Questioning Leninist assertions on the limits of "spontaneous" trade union consciousness, Hyman sets out a more open, dialectical perspective in which trade union struggles, however "economist" may nevertheless alert workers' minds to further questioning of the type of society they live in. The two sides of this crucial ambivalence most explored by Gramsci were firstly the tendencies towards integration and bureaucratisation always inherent in trade unionism, and secondly its positive contribution to working class cohesion, organisation and confidence.

The success of trade unions in winning real reforms for the working class has been seen by some revolutionaries as a fatal block to the growth of revolutionary consciousness among the working class; here, Hyman argues, the crucial question is how these reforms are achieved and how workers see the gains made. He uses Lenin's example of the "bread" to show this:

"In a small working-class house in...Petrograd, dinner is being served. The hostess puts bread on the table. The host says, 'Look what fine bread. "They" dare not give us bad bread now....'

"I was amazed at this class appraisal of the July days...As for bread, I, who had not known want, did not give it a thought...This member of the oppressed

class, however,...takes the bull by the horns with that astonishing simplicity and straightforwardness...from which we intellectuals are as remote as the stars in the sky...

"We squeezed ~~them~~ a bit; 'they' won't dare to lord it over us as they did before. We'll squeeze again - and chuck them out altogether'; that's how the worker thinks and feels" (Lenin, 1917, p120).

However, Hyman also recognises the other elements in trade unionism which, centring as they do around routinism and accommodation and a tradition of "defence not defiance", tend to fall into the gap between consciousness which may be raised by concrete struggles, and any further action. While acknowledging such limitations, we conclude by emphasising their intervening role in "heading-off" or dissipating working class struggles, rather than preventing such struggles at the outset. Gramsci expresses the same point, as it were, in reverse:

"...mass ideological factors always lag behind mass economic phenomena, and...therefore, at certain moments, the automatic thrust due to the economic factor is slowed down, obstructed or even momentarily broken by traditional ideological elements - hence...there must be a conscious, planned struggle to ensure that the exigencies of the economic position of the masses...are understood" (Gramsci, 1971, p168).

The impetus required to actually challenge the "normal", to overthrow what is and always has been the worker's framework of existence, is enormous. Nevertheless to acknowledge that hegemony has continued to triumph "from the top", reinforced by the "working-class ideology" of reformism, must not be to assume that hegemony is structured into the roots of working-class experience. The subversive potential of "economistic" struggles continues.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Case Study One

Before presenting the first of two case studies, it will be useful to review the theoretical concerns which were subjected to empirical test.

#### Theoretical Concerns

The thesis so far has focussed on three areas;

- 1) Criticism of the "control" perspective which has dominated theory on work and the labour process pre and post-Braverman.

It was suggested (chapter 2) that the use of "control" as a central concept in analysing the labour process rested on an assumption that social relationships between management and the workforce are a primary factor defining the nature of the labour process, specifically in terms of domination and subordination. This in its turn rested on a conception of the workforce as fundamentally resisting the alienation of its labour and therefore requiring "subordination" in a political sense in order to coerce it into surrendering labour. Both assumptions were criticised as ignoring the material basis for managerial objectives and worker response within the labour process.

- 2) The advance of an alternative theory of exploitation as the central focus of structure and response within the capitalist labour process.

It was argued (Chapter 3) that the organising principle of the capitalist labour process should be seen as centring on the need to extract surplus value at socially competitive rates. This has the following consequences:

- a) a continual drive by management to shorten necessary labour times.
- b) a corresponding impact on workers in terms of the increased intensification of labour.
- c) Labour can be most usefully understood within this framework as abstract labour, ie labour of which the quantity expressed as time/output

is more important than its quality.

### 3) Examining the content and implications of worker response/ resistance

From a review of existing case studies (chapter 4) it was concluded that worker resistance (both covert and overt) revolves primarily around economic issues. Alienation of labour in itself was not a focus of resistance. Surrendering of labour was seen as an acceptable part of the employment bargain ("willingness to work") though above a certain level intensification of labour would be resisted for a number of reasons including simple incapacity (as well as economic factors such as the maintenance of piecework norms). While resistance was an expression of inherent contradictions within the labour process and was primarily economic, it evoked political implications relating to these contradictions and to issues of class and ownership.

In relation to these theoretical concerns the empirical research sought to test the following hypotheses:

a) Management would be primarily concerned with material factors such as labour cost/labour time reduction, rather than with the political task of maintaining domination over the workforce.

b) Workers would experience the labour process primarily in terms of quantity rather than quality of labour

c) Resentment/resistance would occur primarily over economic issues centred on the effort/reward relationship, not issues of "control".

These hypotheses and their theoretical framework embrace four major variables: reduction of labour time, intensification of labour, abstraction of labour and the structural determinants of resistance. These are pursued within the three main sections of the case study report; Management Objectives, Worker Experience of the Labour Process, and Worker Resistance.

Overall, in the light of our critique of some of the key themes in the labour process debate, and the attempt to establish an alternative analysis centred on exploitation, the research set out to assess

a) the relative importance for workers of "control" variables such as "discretion", "autonomy", influence on working methods etc. and the issues of reward and effort on which our theoretical approach has centred

b) workers' attitudes to the alienation of their labour and whether or not this was in itself a focus of resistance; if not, what were the triggers of overt conflict

c) for management, the relative importance of considerations of "control" in terms of relations with the workforce and their possibly repressive function, as opposed to considerations of cost and profitability.

#### Research at Landis and Gyr

##### 1) Research setting

The research was carried out in the London plant of Landis & Gyr, a British-based multinational manufacturing electricity meters, central heating programming controls, and some telephone equipment. The London plant employed roughly 450 of whom 240 were the direct production manual workers on whom the research was focused. The plant manufactured most of its own parts for assembly into the finished product, and the factory floor was therefore divided into manufacturing and assembly areas, the former with a predominantly male workforce and the latter predominantly female. The production process began with bakelite pellets being melted down and moulded into meter and programmer unit cases in the moulding shop. The metal parts for the products, including most screws, cogs etc. were produced in the adjacent Press shop, then plated and finished. Initial assembly was carried out in the Light Machine Shop and final assembly in the assembly area, which was divided into meter,



dial and programming departments. The main difference between the manufacturing and assembly areas was that work in the former was machine-based whereas the assembly was carried out almost entirely "with hands". The management structure in the factory was fairly complex, with both line and staff functions well represented. An overall Works Director presided over two superintendents, one manufacturing and one assembly, each of whom had both foremen and chargehands supervising their separate departments. On the staff side were a production control manager, a work study manager (as well as, temporarily, a work study consultant who had been involved in the recent job re-measurement exercise), a personnel manager, quality control manager, production engineering manager and factory accountant. There was also a post known as Operations Executive occupied by the man who had been supplanted by the new Works Director, and who was now effectively his deputy.

## 2) Interviewing schedule

Over a period of approximately 6 weeks 44 interviews were carried out, 14 of which were with management, 2 with foremen, 3 with shop stewards and 25 with the direct workforce. Among management, the Quality Control Manager, Assembly Superintendent and Personnel Manager were interviewed twice. All the major management representatives were interviewed, two out of six direct production foremen, seven out of fourteen shop stewards and 22 out of about 200 direct production workers (more were spoken to during observation). A comparatively small number and proportion of foremen and shop stewards were interviewed because their position was seen as less central to the concerns of the research.

In addition to interviewing, informal "observation" took place on the shop floor, affording many opportunities for comments from workers which are reproduced below (it is indicated whether comments were recorded in observation or interview). During the period of the research I attended

one management meeting and, during the two-week dispute which began two weeks after the start of the research, three strike meetings.

### 3) Recent History and Current Situation

The situation in the factory at the time of the research was dominated by the issue of "performance", ie the number of units a worker was scheduled to produce in a set time under the work measurement system (MTM or Methods-Time Measurement. The details of the system are discussed in section 2 below). The existing performance standards were the result of a widespread "remeasurement exercise" on job times which had been in progress in the factory over a number of years and had only recently been completed. This exercise had been preceded in 1975 with the introduction of a new job evaluation system and had culminated in agreements over the last two years (1982 and 1983) which traded detailed productivity provisions for specific percentage increases. This approach had been initiated by the new Works Director, brought into the company in early 1981 as part of a management shakeup. The 1983 agreement which he had co-ordinated was particularly controversial because of its introduction of the concept of "job families". This integrated job flexibility into the structure of the labour process through acceptance of the principle that workers could be moved from one to the other of a range of purportedly interchangeable jobs.

Three significant changes had thus taken place over the previous eight years in the factory:

- i) The introduction of a new job evaluation scheme and grading structure
- ii) The remeasurement and consequent "tightening" of times on all direct production jobs; the introduction of "job families".
- iii) The instigation of a new and more aggressive top management with an explicit policy of incorporating productivity targets into pay negotiations.

These changes were the result of:

- i) An overall deterioration in the company's competitive position
- ii) A loss of control by management over work targets and bonus equivalents.

These factors will be examined in more detail in the analysis of managerial objectives and attitudes.

#### 4) Management Responses

The analysis begins by presenting the expressed objectives of management, which fall into two main categories, technical functions and cost reduction. We then go on to probe the underlying implications of management's professed attitudes in the section on "control", which also takes up the linked issues of labour flexibility and "performance". Finally, the obstacles to the attainment of managerial objectives, and management's response to these obstacles, are discussed.

##### i) Managerial objectives, as management sees them.

Before beginning this section, it is pertinent to add a brief note on the concept of managerial strategy, which has become a focus of debate over the last few years. This debate appears to have centred on the question of whether there exists the possibility of strategic choice. In the situation prevailing within the factory, in which harsh competitive pressures appeared to invoke an overwhelming imperative of cost reduction, the idea of any such choice appears largely irrelevant. However, this point need not rule out any conception of a strategy. It can be said that managerial strategy - the long-term and medium-term plans within the company - was directed at achieving a highly specific goal in the most effective way. Thus, although the term managerial objectives is used as relating more directly to the managers' own conceptions of those objectives, it is not meant as a rejection of the notion of managerial strategy. Rather, such objectives are seen as

occurring within an existing construct of overall strategic choice determined at a higher level of strategic planning such as that involved in choosing markets, etc.

Secondly, it has been seen as valuable to express managerial objectives as the managers themselves saw them, from the point of view that what are viewed as priorities by managers are most likely to govern managerial behaviour, whether or not such perceptions accurately reflect the feasibility of achieving the objectives (in the light of factors to which the managers devoted relatively little attention, ie aspects of worker response). Thus it is argued that it is goals or targets, specifically of a quantitative nature, rather than more qualitative features of everyday experience, which principally structure managerial behaviour and which are seen and expressed as objectives by those managers. While Richard Hyman is correct to argue that such "determinations" of strategy "are themselves contradictory" (Hyman, 1984, p4) the fact that management fails to see the contradictions is important in shaping the actual behaviour of managers and its consequent impact on the workforce.

We now go on to look at how managers defined their objectives.

#### A) "Technical" Functions

Most managers initially responded to the question "What do you see as your main role as a manager?" in terms of their own specific "technical" function. By "technical" we mean functions which are defined without reference to management/worker relations, in purely productive terms. Responses included:

"I work towards an ideal situation - the monthly build programme - we aim to match all customer orders week to week to delivery dates" - Production Control Manager.

"Work study includes two disciplines, work measurement and method study" (followed by a technical explanation of both disciplines) - Work Study Manager.

"I supervise and am responsible for the assembly and test of meters and central heating controls, as well as the cardphone" - Assembly Superintendent.

"Managing the production unit, the works division. Quantity, mix of products and quality, all to be realised at certain cost levels" - Works Director.

All nine managers directly questioned on their objectives initially replied in these technical terms. Such a functional definition of objectives, while perhaps predictable, is significant in showing that managers did not see their role immediately in terms of social relationships with the workforce. Workers themselves were in fact seldom mentioned, even by the personnel manager, except as an undifferentiated commodity, "labour", and as a cost. The response also shows that production is seen by management as primarily "neutral" and technical, rather than as a battle for control in which a major priority is the suppression of a recalcitrant workforce. However, when a supplementary question was asked as to further managerial functions, the technicist approach was found to front a problematic of "cost" and competition.

#### b) Cost Reduction

The "second-order" definition of objectives was given, again almost uniformly, in terms of costs. 8 out of 9 managers mentioned reduction of costs as their prime goal, as opposed to function. The prioritisation of cost factors over and above more "human" aspects of management was

particularly noteworthy in the case of the work study and personnel managers, both of whose roles related directly, though in different ways, to the central points of conflict within the factory. Thus the work study manager gave as the definition of his department's overall objectives: "We're trying to determine the most cost-effective methods in order to achieve profitability for the company - to minimise the manufacturing costs involved...The whole costing structure of the company is geared to work standards." The personnel manager, discussing the progress of the "performance"-related incentive scheme, displayed a similar outlook: "(The scheme) is worth it because the cost of the salary is offset by what they're producing - the company gains more by a higher level of performance - the more that's produced the lower the proportion of costs...we're now in the stage of taking money off them."

What is notable about both these statements is not so much the presumption of the scheme's success (itself remarkable in view of the large minority of workers still failing to achieve performance) but the "absence" of the workers who were actually struggling to produce to these work standards. The impact of the scheme was assessed solely in terms of a cost-benefit calculus rather than being seen as a vehicle of managerial "control". This attitude, everyday enough in hardheaded management circles, nevertheless belies some of the preoccupations attributed to management in labour process theory.

The prioritisation of "cost" was affirmed by both the line managers, the assembly and manufacturing superintendents. The assembly superintendent put it most clearly: "Getting the product on line at the right time with all costing...It's co-ordination - giving guidance to foremen - efficiency can become slack, for example, on timekeeping. Also going into costs - trying to cut down on costs." This included "Cutting indirect time down to the minimum - for example waiting time, machine breakdown,

parts not available etc." The manufacturing superintendent, logically for one in charge of a machine-based department, was more concerned with plant investment and its relation to the competitive position of the company:

"My long-term objectives on the plant side are to do with investment planning five years ahead...In investment planning you try to go with the time, be as up to date as possible in equipment in order to be competitive - there's fierce competition in the market."

Staff managers reinforced the "cost" perspective from the standpoint of their own particular specialisms. For example, enlarging on the definition of his overall objectives as "to produce in the most efficient manner at the least possible cost" the production engineering manager went on: "Each employee should earn his own salary by cost reduction. Can you eliminate a worker operation altogether? Can you combine one operation with another - get the operator to do two things at once? This is done through methods improvement. Or, can you improve it by using different jigs or tools? Provide a jig so that a girl can use two hands, drill two holes at once...?"

This interview was conducted during a two week strike which had occurred over a threat to dismiss two workers for low performance, yet the manager's analysis was presented entirely in terms of cost criteria, with no mention of worker response. Similarly, in an interview with the factory accountant which was also carried out during the strike, the manager referred to labour only as a "cost": "For any part of the product, we establish the standard cost of manufacturing, like if you take a programmer case...We know how much powder, how much labour content goes in to make up a standard cost per case." "Labour" was not only correlated with "powder" as a constituent of the product, but was also subjected to the same standards of measurement: "We use the materials

in stock to start with to make standard values - when we issue the cost, we stick to the standard. When it's labour, we stick to standard hours - this goes through at standard labour costs, all through the factory."

Despite the emphasis on measuring and monitoring rather than directly influencing production levels, the accountant's department could be seen as central to the issues of conflict within the factory. The department worked to cost standards, of which standard labour hours (the measured level of 'performance') were a central component; its job was to monitor these and report variances to higher management. Thus the accountancy department was centrally involved in the criteria by which the work rates of the 'people upstairs' were judged; it attached the crucial variable, cost, to the standards established by the work study department. Any failure to measure up to these standards had its correlate in pounds and pence. As the accountant himself concluded: 'We get the financial side on to production systems - we need production control knowledge, work study knowledge, we have to hang money on to all the systems and procedures that they work to'.

The last thing the factory accountant was consciously concerned about was the issue of workers' experience of and response to the labour process, yet the work of his department had a central impact on that process. This echoed a paradox prevailing throughout management in the factory. The single-minded emphasis on quantitative and measurable criteria regarding 'labour' is not taken to preclude any wider managerial ideology allocating a subordinate political position to the workforce. The point is that this was how management saw their job. Their daily activity consisted centrally in carrying out the practical outcomes of an overwhelming imperative of cost reduction. The structure of control over the workforce, if as such it should be seen, itself



stemmed entirely from this imperative. There appeared not to be a largescale ideological determinant either in management's activity or their expressed opinions which carried with it a specific goal of subordinating or exercising authority over the workforce.

Finally, although the emphasis was mainly on the reduction of costs in order simply to keep afloat in the competitive struggle, this was clearly connected to an overall goal of profitability. The Works Director linked the two issues:

"The job of management is to use all available resources, including human, etc., but all resources for the main objective - profit, where it all comes from." The production engineer, too, was clear that the efficiency he was trying to promote was not an end in itself, but would "depend on what output you want" - ie the state of the market. We have seen that, as hypothesised, the managers interviewed expressed or sought to engage with worker response. This was paradoxical, since the defined objectives in fact relied on factors centring on worker response such as "performance". However, it is suggested that, firstly, the prioritisation of economic goals stemmed from the real competitive pressures prevailing in the world outside the company; and, secondly, it was the managerial definitions of the situation stemming from these, rather than worker response, which structured how the labour process was actually managed, ie with a view to the maximum intensification of labour.

#### ii) "Control", Performance, Flexibility

In this section we attempt to go beyond managers' own rather restricted definitions of their objectives to the nature of the priorities which determined their activities and how these interacted with their relations with workers.

a) "Control"

In order to arrive at some connections between the "cost" problematic and the related area of worker response which management was in fact forced to confront, the research tested managerial attitudes towards the concept of "control" of which, as set out above, the thesis as a whole is critical. A limited number of responses were obtained which dealt purely with this issue (in reply to a "multiple-choice" question which asked managers to choose between various aspects of management):

"I would go for co-ordination rather than control. There's not a problem of exercising control....who goes on what job - that should be and is management's function. Old-fashioned 'work hard'-type control is irrelevant" - the manufacturing superintendent.

On the relationship between control and authority, the assembly superintendent said, "I don't deal with the day-to-day running of work - it's the foreman's job to maintain authority over the workforce. There's no real control function....Yes, I agree management has a right to manage - that's what it's all about...management's job is long-term planning, overall long-term strategy, making sure this is the right way of doing things."

Insofar as there was any activity of "controlling" workers to ensure that they surrendered the right amount of labour, then, this was relegated down to supervisory level. We shall see below (section iii) that the foreman did not see their main role as the coercion of the workforce. In any case, it was clear from the manager's comments that this was not a central area of "overall long-term strategy".

Most managers responded to the question on "control" obliquely, with comments like (Works Director): "Control over people? They're one vital resource, I treat them all the same way" or the manufacturing

superintendent's response in terms of job allocation and flexibility.

"Well, I have overall control over manpower - we haven't got a surplus of manpower - I have to assess how many we should have, how many we need".

The area in which the concept came most into its own was in discussion of the history and rationale of the work measurement changes. Here, several managers spoke spontaneously in terms of a dynamic of "control": "The tighter rate system was introduced because people queried the times a lot, the weaker management gave in, times got out of control, they were far too generous, people were earning lots of money for little return" (manufacturing superintendent).

"The company was losing money - the times were out of control - there was no incentive - people were being paid for no effort" (Quality Control Manager).

"Far too many jobs were being queried, the system was grinding to a standstill...There were effects on overall efficiency - we were paying more money out than we were getting back as regards output. It was moving out of our hands...We were gradually losing control of some of the work, because we couldn't control and plan it, because we were getting large amounts of unmeasured work...People wouldn't put in reasonable effort on queried and unmeasured work." (Operations Executive).

The Quality Control manager enlarged on the dynamics of the situation:

"Management just didn't have a system. The union had driven a wedge through it, with leapfrogging etc. Management lost control rather than the workforce gaining it. Management lost control through their own inertia. Remeasurement wasn't an attempt to break worker resistance, but to get the system back."

Managers' responses to questions on "control" primarily in terms of the work measurement system demonstrated that their definitions of the concept were located in what was itself an economic rather than political dynamic

of the relation between bonus and output. It was this managerial approach, rather than any more abstract notion of domination over the workforce, which both determined and reflected the organisation of the labour process. There were, then, two main points regarding this setting for "control" relationships: firstly that the situation seemed to be less one of the workforce gaining control than of management gradually losing it; and secondly that the overwhelming use of the term "control" was in relation to labour time. It was not the workforce, their response and resistance, that was out of control, but the speed and measurement of output. Thus the management and timing of work is seen as a crucial aspect of the retention of management controls, which in their turn are an economic rather than a political necessity: "Management's right to manage interrelates with cutting costs" (Assembly Superintendent). The notion of "control" was mediated through the setting and imposition of quantitative targets for worker "performance", rather than by any reference to notions of worker resistance or consent.

b) Performance. The issue of "performance" divides into two areas: the methods and approach used in calculating performance targets, and the significance of the targets for company goals, the structuring of the labour process, and management-worker relationships. This latter includes managerial approaches to and interpretations of the problems of "low performance".

The calculation of performance targets was the job of the work study department, whose operations were divided into work measurement and method study. Although method study was clearly relevant to the overall aim of reducing time, within the system adopted by the work study department it was mainly carried out at the production planning stage, since the department itself worked mainly to "synthetic" times calculated according to the work measurement system known as MTM ("Methods-Time

Measurement"). The elements from which times in this "pre-determined motion-time system" were calculated were known as TMUs - time-measured units - each of which represented .0001 of an hour. A number of these would go into the measurement of a basic motion such as reach, grasp, transfer etc., any one of which, or a combination, could be used in an undifferentiated range of work tasks. "Performance" was then calculated on the basis of the standard time for a job based on adding together all the TMUs contained in the basic motions that went into making up that job. If an operator carried out the job within that time, she would be said to have achieved 100, or "performance"; if she did the job more quickly, she would qualify for a bonus; if she took more time over it than the standard, she would still earn the basic wage, but would be open, at Landis and Gyr, to the first steps in the "low performance procedure". This key issue of performance raises a number of points, both theoretical and research-related, which are examined in the following sections.

Abstraction of Labour. The microscopic elements into which labour was divided in the MTM system appeared symbolic of the tendency towards abstraction of labour which is discussed below in the comments on worker response. Examination of the MTM tables reveals a dissection and classification of basic work motions which robs labour of any specific use-related content. Precise classifications into, for example, Grasp: regrasp, transfer grasp, object jumbled with other objects, etc., not only subject labour to such detailed measurement as to indicate an overwhelming preoccupation with labour time but also, paradoxically, rob labour of any identifiable content by making it all reducible to the same interchangeable components.

Counterposing of mathematically calculated work standards to actual worker performance. The work standards which were calculated within the MTM system had a twin rationale for the company: firstly, they were the

standards of performance and output the company required to be competitive; secondly, they represented the maximum theoretically possible extraction of surplus value. For both of these reasons, the MTM standards stood as an unchallengeable representation of "paper" production imperatives set by the company. At the same time, they ignored both the actual complexities of the labour process and any considerations of worker response. We examine the relation of these imperatives to company goals and to the structuring of the labour process.

### Significance of the Targets for Company Goals

The work study manager himself had pointed out that "the whole costing structure of the company is geared to work standards", but the Personnel Manager, speaking during the strike, put the point more explicitly: "The times are the basis of the costing structure, the costing structure is the basis of profits. You're not just measuring jobs, you're making sure that you have an accurate basis for costings...The issue of efficiency is about imposing efficiency through changes in work design, new machinery, changes in work performance. If we're not prepared to bite the bullet, we go down...For example, we put a tender in the Hong Kong market, £10 per item. The Japanese put in £7. At £10 we make no profit, at £7 we lose it - we missed the order. The difference is labour costs, a substantial amount of that difference is worker performance..."

This, then, was the imperative behind the setting of the performance targets, but invoking it could not overcome the fact that these targets were not, or at least not uniformly or consistently, being met. This was the general problems of "low performance" which was then dominating the factory. Before looking in detail at managerial responses to this problem, however, we examine a more fundamental theoretical issue, the role played by the setting of the targets in drawing out the maximum amount of surplus value from the potential offered by the workforce.

### The Structuring of the Labour Process

The works director spelt this out, first in his acknowledgement of the lack of practical realism in the targets:

"Our output projections aren't based on MTM standards - these assume that theory lives up to practice. In practice there's a lot of disruption. From one side MTM is very important for the wage structure, for budget estimates, from the other we use it to calculate a rolling average for production over the quarter, month etc...If you look from the theoretical side you imply all waste will be eliminated...The budget sets a target - it's a reference. The practical figures may or may not match. Budget forecasts are needed to take decisions - for daily management, forget it."

What then was the point of using the standards? The works director went on to say:

"In the opinion of the experts the times are accurate - I feel they're accurate within 5%. By setting targets you improve by 10% anyway. The difference between having MTM and having no objectives is 20%."

With this calculus the works director indicated clearly the impact of quantified performance targets on the structuring and organisation of the labour process. Quantitative, "scientifically"-calculated work standards defined what was expected of the workforce by providing measured output goals around which the labour process was built and towards which the workers struggled. It was MTM that was the slavedriver, not management or the foreman.

### Management and "Low Performance"

Few other managers shared the clear-eyed perspective of the works director. Most either assumed that the work standards were an acceptable and normal aspect of production ("The times are then issued to the shop floor and people work to them" - work study manager) or treated the problems as a minor irritant:

"It's a day-to-day event for people to query times - it causes minor interruptions in production, means discussing the matter with the operator, the representative etc. In the long term if they see they can't just query things for the sake of it they'll just get on with the job."

Manufacturing Superintendent.

The problem, then, was to some extent seen as inevitable. However, opinions differed as to whether it had its roots in structure or attitude, and the best way of dealing with it. We conclude this section by looking at some of these issues.

#### Managerial attitudes to the problem of low performance

The problem of low performance was formally, if tacitly, acknowledged in the plant through the operation of a Low Performance Procedure, which consisted initially of the issuing of a warning letter to any employee whose average performance over a month had fallen below 100. Such a letter would instigate a three-month investigation period, at the end of which, if the operator was considered responsible for the low performance, disciplinary action might be taken. Any warning would "last" for 6 months, although an improvement in performance to 100 or above would be expected within two, and continued low performance would lead to "a second and a third written warning and ultimately dismissal from the company".

However, the procedure had in effect a purely disciplinary role, rather than indicating any concern to engage with the problems leading to low performance. Managers present at a meeting to discuss a slight revision in the procedure revealed a simple perspective of "operator failure": "All the conditions are there to perform - if they don't make 100, the operator must be to blame. We can only afford to have a few of those around, or we won't make any money."



"Blaming the operator", where this position on worker response was pursued, could only lead to a rooting of the problem in a failure of worker attitudes:

"It isn't an ideal system - there's too many loopholes. After they've been here a while they know how many they have to do, they pace themselves. They're reaching what they want, not giving the maximum" (Press Shop foreman). The works director, too, when it came to analysis of the problem and its possible solutions, abandoned his earlier more sober assessments for a rhetoric of moral exhortation:

"If you measure an individual job, they can easily do 130 in an hour." (Workers later challenged this with the argument that "I can run from my house to my car, but I can't keep that speed up for 20 miles"). "People must realise they're not paid for attendance, but for effort. We do have a problem of people not working hard enough. It's a question of organisation - we do have to eliminate bad parts, etc. Organisation can give them an excuse - the reasons must be eliminated. This is the job of supervision. Low performance must be overcome by 'preaching' to people - the point of the low performance programme isn't to make people redundant, but to eliminate the causes of bad performance."

Ultimately, then, low performance was seen as a question of "attitude", to be overcome by "preaching". In practice, however, such crusading fervour was a rarity, even for the Works Director. Basically, the issue of worker response was not taken seriously by management. Philosophising about such issues as "motivation" was a luxury, an occasion for production of knowledge of "Theory X " and "Theory Y", but not a process on which analysis and action was based. These were confined to the calculation of what levels of performance were needed, not with whether they could be achieved.

As opposed to this, however, there was some understanding of the salience of structural factors in influencing worker performance. The Dial Assembly foreman dismissed the warning letters issued under the low performance procedure as pointless:

"On that discipline - I've been given two"(letters) "this morning - I just don't feel justified in giving letters to people with other problems. It won't do them any good. We aren't justified in issuing people with warnings. The letters themselves have got to the stage of being meaningless - they all know they're not earning 100 performance..."

At the moment we're not pushing people to work harder because we know there are so many outside problems. After quality, layout, method is sorted out we'll then say, now you can make performance. Jigs, fixtures, etc., they'll all a problem. The layout's totally wrong, jobs are bouncing around all over the place. Insufficient containers for parts, no one to fetch and carry things, bad quality parts. These things are more important than lack of motivation. They (the operators) think that if they get stuck in, somewhere along the line they'll hit a snag."

There was a mixture here of "attitudinal" factors and the way in which these in turn, justifiably according to the foreman, were affected by the structural inadequacies of work organisation. There was no point in the workers trying to work to the required level - sooner or later they would be brought up against an obstacle which was not their fault. At the same time, despite this more tolerant view born perhaps of his closeness to the production process, the foreman still insisted that the MTM targets were ultimately attainable. In his view the key to this was training:

"With training, training, training you get there in the end. Is it counter-productive to set high numbers? Not if you have back-up - workstudy, quality control, training etc. Some of these jobs are impossible without basic

training - we need someone to show these girls we're interested in them getting performance."

This foreman appeared to have a view of workers as a kind of "tuneupable" machine - if the process was repeated often enough, they would eventually perform adequately and predictably. The Assembly Superintendent also showed some awareness of the importance of structural factors, though seeming almost resigned to an inevitable shortfall in performance in his department, which, as the most labour-intensive in the factory, was currently recording only 76% "achieved hours". Pushing the workforce was in fact seen as counterproductive:

"There's a continuous struggle to get more effort out, we'd like to be always pushing up effort, or things get slack, costs go up. We can't go too hard, or they start rebelling. The structuring of the work is more important. If there's a consistent flow of work, the workers are more motivated, there's a natural increase in output. If we keep pushing the workforce you may get a limited increase, but then they'll creak up... Management's right to manage interrelates with cutting costs. If you push them along, control them, you get motivation because the work is continually going along. There's a flow of work. The operators aren't paid to solve problems."

There was an interesting assimilation here between the functions of management, the organisation of work, and the motivation of the workforce. The job of management, even its "right to manage", was not seen as "control" in the authoritarian sense but as the structuring of production in such a way that a flow of work was achieved which in its turn would motivate the workforce by providing them with a meaningful work pattern and a clear opportunity to enhance earnings. This structuring of work, overcoming of problems or hiccups in the smooth path of the production process, was

management's function (and not, it was emphasised, the *workers'*).

There was certainly no principled attempt to impose managerial authority for its own sake - in fact if anything the reverse:

"If the job changes, you get resistance - so changes are introduced as little as possible - if you're getting efficiency, don't touch it.

Not because the workers are strong, but because disruption upsets everything. If there isn't a necessary cost reason for change, we won't disrupt."

Here a problematic of "efficiency" and "cost" was explicitly substituted for one of managerial authority and the suppression of worker resistance. To sum up, then, "control" for management at Landis and Gyr was mediated through "performance", which itself was seen strictly in materialist terms rather than as an aspect of any kind of power struggle.

Finally, we consider another dimension of this pattern of work relationships, flexibility, which can be seen as itself a further illustration of the abstraction of labour implicit in the MTM system.

### c) Flexibility of Labour

A general goal of management, flexibility had recently taken a highly specific shape within Landis and Gyr through the "job families" system included in the June 1983 pay agreement. This was the culmination of a general war on "custom and practice" and similar obstacles to full managerial control over work organisation which had been waged by the Dutch works director since his introduction to the company two years previously. Immediately struck by the lack of flexibility in the workforce, his first move was to eliminate the customary 10% level of guaranteed overtime, followed by the introduction of fixed-term temporary labour contracts to deal with peaks in orders. The manager then, on the basis of full implementation of the still only half-completed work

measurement programme, introduced in the 1982 agreement the principle of trading a guaranteed level of "performance" for percentage increases. In 1983 the principle was extended to the specific measures contained in the concept of "job families";

'We asked the union: 'Do you agree that if a person knows how to put screws in, he can do it for any type of screw - a small one, large one, black or green one?' They agreed the principle, and we said, 'Okay, we will bring together all the jobs that we think require the same training and the same skills.'

In fact this innocuous-sounding "principle" brought in its train a considerable intensification of labour, made worse by the abrupt reduction in training allowance based on the alleged similarity of new jobs to the old. The impact on the workforce of sudden switches to "new jobs" was considerable, as will be considered in more detail below.

Nevertheless, that the scheme was conceivable and at least in part workable is testament to exactly the lack of differentiation between jobs suggested in the "same training, same skills" concept to which the manager referred. This kind of total job flexibility, total interchangeability between jobs, can be a function only of a labour process totally given over to the production of value, not use. Indeed, the difference between jobs which workers cited as making the achievement of performance impossible were differences of speed, not job content, mainly attributable to the lack of training on new, if not entirely different, jobs. The Dial Assembly foreman had drawn attention to this: "One week a person's doing a job - 120 performance - next week they're training - back on the (low performance) list.... Supervision was supposed to train people up on three jobs by Christmas - they can't get performance on one, let alone three."

The kind of flexibility of labour shown in the job families programme is often seen as a further instrument of managerial control, specifically

in terms of overcoming some worker controls within the labour process such as job demarcation. Indeed, the system of job families was explicitly launched in order to remove demarcation and thus fill in some of the pores in the labour process: "...an employee whose job it was to insert screws might refuse to transfer to another, very similar job. Supervision had to spend a lot of time trying to get people to move to other work when their jobs were stopped...The employees preferred to be booked on waiting time - they didn't want to move."

Whether the introduction of flexibility between jobs is used as a means of reinforcing managerial authority is however a different matter. The manufacturing superintendent, enthusiastically welcoming the job families scheme as "really planned flexibility", presented it in a neutral and "technical" light as an aspect of the specification of work within the job evaluated grading structure: "People know what is the range of work for which they get paid." What is more, he claimed (inaccurately, as it turned out) that "People are completely co-operative in changing round within grades." The scheme was clearly not seen as having as its specific purpose a strengthening of managerial authority.

The use of labour flexibility as a managerial weapon with which to further subordinate the workforce is, then, questioned in this analysis. What is emphasised is its use to fill in the "pores" of the labour process and thus gain more continuous production, and also its roots in the abstraction of labour. Managerial "controls" are certainly here counterposed to worker "controls" but in both cases the controls are aspects in the exploitation relationship and are not primarily weapons in a power struggle.

In its examination of the relationship between expressed managerial objectives and a possible hidden agenda of "control", the research showed

that any "control" considerations on the part of management were articulated through a framework of labour time and performance. Even when focussing on the latter issue, which was a major area of conflict in the factory at the time, there was little spontaneous discussion of worker response and no apparent managerial perspective which had the crushing of worker resistance at its centre. Although, finally, the latest proposals concerning performance had a specific effect in increasing labour flexibility, the overall purpose was again conceived as a shortening of labour time.

In our third section on managerial responses, we go on to look at how successfully these "performance"-related objectives were carried out with regard to their imposition on the workforce, and how management dealt with any obstacles to their objectives in this respect.

### iii) Objectives and Obstacles

Obstacles to managerial objectives have often been assumed in the literature to consist of organised worker resistance and associated "controls" to which management responds with a set of strategies centred on the subordination of the workforce. At Landis and Gyr it was found that while the introduction of for example job families had had the effect of lessening what worker discretion existed within the labour process, it was, ironically, management's disregarding of issues of worker response which brought about some of the more significant obstacles in the way of management objectives. These clustered around two sets of contradictions centred on, respectively, performance and work organisation.

#### Performance

We have already dealt with many of the issues surrounding the managerial attitude to performance. Here we focus on the implications

of management's failure to confront the response of workers faced with theoretical, numerically calculated norms of work performance. This managerial evasion of workers' feelings about the labour process took two forms:

a) The disputes procedure which had been set up to deal with specific complaints about work rates was ineffective.

b) The agreements, particularly the most recent, whose practical effect was a significant increase in labour intensification, had been forced through without an assessment of their potential for conflict.

a) The disputes procedure. Because of the structuring of the labour process towards mathematically calculated targets as opposed to any assessment of productivity based on empirical examination of the actual labour process, the workers' own experience was not only discounted but was in practice helpless in the face of management's definition of the situation. Thus the disputes procedure which was supposed to be set in motion when a worker queried a rate was in reality a dead letter, meaning usually a period of two to three months before anyone from the Work Study department would come to look at the job. The post of Trade Union representative on timings, as we show later, was similarly meaningless, since the worker's own experience of the job was useless in the face of the work study calculations. Paradoxically, however, this relentless imposition of managerial definitions created another obstacle to the achievement of performance, in terms of a loss of worker motivation. Talking about the rates disputes procedure, the Press Shop foreman said:

"This causes a problem because they expect an immediate reply, I have to go through the work study department, and if they don't get service as soon as possible they get discontented. There's no stoppage of the job no matter what the query, the time on the job will stand and they'll work to that, otherwise we'll use the disciplinary procedure...Production



carries on, the only trouble is sometimes they feel the time is not going to be changed - 'I'm not going to reach the time so I'll just get by.'

b) Problems with the agreements. Because of the overwhelming salience of the profitability/performance imperative for the company, management was unable to face up to the possibility of and basis for a worker response which conflicted with this imperative:

"I challenge them to prove I'm not right - if people don't want to perform we're back to the original situation with the company threatened with shutdown..." - works director..

Unfortunately, this perspective left the same manager, when he did pronounce on the subject, unable to provide more than a caricature of the nature of worker response and resistance:

"I think some workers are there only to fight management. Even if you say you are going to double their salary they reply, 'We don't accept it, and if you give it to us we'll strike!'"

In the long term the refusal to confront and understand the nature of worker response and resistance led to a "firefighting" approach which could be said to be counterproductive in terms of the objective of consistent and predictable levels of output. As the assembly superintendent put it during the strike, talking about the agreement embodying "job families" which was at the root of the dispute: "If they'd rejected it, it could have been renegotiated in more detail, we could have reached a compromise. As it is, the issues are being fought out now rather than being negotiated."

Thus the imposition of targets over which there could in fact have been "compromise" was accepted as leading to the occasional eruption of conflict, rather than being modified to fit in with the real conditions

of the labour process. Indeed, the manager abandoned his brief concession to the workers' point of view for refuge in the quantitative certainties of capitalism:

"Is conflict inevitable? Well, people have got to understand a lot more of the detailed side of finance and costings...In the end we are going to say Well OK you know about it, you accept it or - It'll make us less competitive with other companies if we can't get performance."

### Obstacles to Objectives in Work Organisation

This persistent conflict between a necessary, from the managerial point of view, insistence on quantitative targets and the qualitative content and experience of the labour process is echoed in the sphere of the technical organisation of work itself. Here the problems can be classified into two areas, production engineering and quality control.

a) Production Engineering. The overall objectives of the production engineering department were those of monitoring the design of products and machinery, developing more effective production methods and improving job design. These were all crucial to the long-term position of the company as an intelligent investor and competitive unit. However, such higher-order objectives were rarely obtained because, in the Production Engineer's words, "We spend 40-50% of our time 'trouble-shooting'." This problem was caused, fundamentally, by line management's failure to use worker knowledge as a way of sorting out everyday production problems which cropped up on the shop floor: "The reasons? Supervision relies on production engineering to help them sort out their problems.... parts are never going to go smoothly. A slight change in material may need a change in temperature, etc. The operator will see the problem, will tell the supervisor but won't have the knowledge to put it right. It probably would help in some instances for the operator to have more

knowledge...then he could deal with the problem at the grass roots rather than calling on us."

b) Quality Control. The contradictions suggested in the Production Engineer's account appeared in a slightly different form in the sphere of quality control, with the major objective of improving quality constantly frustrated by the emphasis on output. This was expressed in terms both of the relentless managerial pressure for production and of employees' own concern for their bonuses:

"Not getting rejects is very difficult - you have three problems: first of all, if you stop the job because of bad quality, it affects output; secondly, the tooling of the machine may be inaccurate; and thirdly the operators themselves aren't that quality conscious because of the bonus." There was a further conflict between the manufacturing workers' "bashing out" of parts, driven on by the bonus, and the ensuing poor quality of the parts passed on to the assemblers. Underlying these problems was a basic worker distrust of management, which made them reluctant to co-operate in the quality control campaign because of its implications for their workload (in fact, according to workers I spoke to later, they simply did not have time to carry out the monitoring required in the campaign). This mistrust found its endorsement in the low opinion by management of workers' capabilities: "You would need reasonably intelligent people wanting to be involved in work. The main factors for workers are money and social life...They haven't got technical reasoning overall - they don't know why it goes together or what happens" (the assembly superintendent's response to the suggestion of "quality circles").

The "mistrust" of management by the workers and managerial reluctance to give up their monopoly on information which marked the issues discussed above can be seen as typical of the overall antagonism of interests which existed at a structural (not necessarily personal)

level in the factory. Other roots, and expressions, of this fundamental antagonism were found of course in the related areas of work measurement, flexibility of labour, bonus and "performance". Paradoxically, however, a central point emerging from our study of managerial attitudes was that managers did not identify their tasks, functions or objectives in terms of the need to deal with a (potentially or actively) resistant workforce. In fact management was not interested in worker co-operation, or worker response of any kind. The issues around which the labour process revolved, for them, were the technical and "cost" imperatives outlined above within which labour remained, however awkward and unpredictable, essentially a commodity.

iv) Conclusions on Management Response.

We can sum up our findings on management response in terms of these ultimately quantitative objectives and their detachment from any problematic of "control". Bearing in mind our original hypothesis about the managerial preoccupation with material issues, we conclude that:

1. Managerial activities and objectives were classified by them into three main groups: monitoring/reducing costs, reducing labour time (achieving "performance") and increasing labour flexibility. These all reflected a conception of management which was primarily economic (concerned with quantities of output) rather than political (concerned with relations of subordination and domination).
2. There was a paradox between this problematic on the part of management and the failure to explore the causes for the prevailing poor performance record which clashed with the "costs" objective. Thus while the objectives themselves were being undermined by aspects of worker response, management largely failed to engage with such response, even when it erupted in the form of a strike.

3. The emphasis on quantitative factors (how much, how quickly) in the organisation of the labour process led to a neglect of factors like product quality and machine tooling, with the result that the overall objectives of the company in terms of an efficiently produced and saleable product were in themselves continually frustrated. This involved aspects of worker response - worker knowledge and the need for co-operation - which management, in their preoccupation with economic targets, appeared to see as irrelevant.

We now go on to examine the response of the workforce to the situation at Landis and Gyr.

## 2. Worker Responses

Worker responses are discussed under three headings, which in different ways refer to the consequences of the managerial drive towards the reduction of labour time for workers' experience of the labour process. The first of these discusses workers' own preoccupation with quantitative aspects of the labour process, including the impact of increased labour flexibility. The second covers the area of worker response to working methods, quality etc. The third covers issues of acquiescence and resistance, examining first of all the issue of "willingness to work" and going on to look at workers' attitudes towards the desirability and feasibility of overt resistance. This section includes a brief account of the strike.

The first two of these categories of worker response can be linked with the theoretical issues of the intensification and abstraction of labour, while the third provides some empirical background regarding the content and implications of worker resistance.

i) Quantity not quality.

The first point to be made here is the priority which workers in both manufacturing and assembly gave to quantitative factors, when asked a general question on their "feelings about work". Of the 45 workers spoken to in interview or observation, 30 raised the "performance" issue spontaneously as their first point, and 5 as their second. Few workers of their own accord prioritised factors such as job content, skill level, worker autonomy/discretion or levels of managerial discretion, although two workers in the moulding shop concentrated their initial interview comments around the issue of supervision. Four out of the 17 direct production workers interviewed did make an initial comment regarding the more "qualitative" issues listed above, but the bulk of the interview material tended to centre on issues of MTM/performance. The meaning of the work was, for these workers, effort, "performance", output. In examining their comments we focus on three categories, though these frequently overlap: whether or not the worker actually makes performance, or a bonus; how hard they worked, in either case; and the impact of job families. We preface these comments, however, with an analysis of some of the firm's own statistics on performance.

These fall into three groups: a comparison of bonuses between different departments for 2 weeks in 1983/84, a performance summary for four weeks in 1983, and differences between achieved and measured hours in 1983.

Of these, the first shows that bonuses in all the departments listed, both manufacturing and assembly, tended to fall between weeks 12 of 1983 and 1984. The second item shows generally higher performance averages among manufacturing workers, though some, for example in the press shop, barely make performance despite the built in 20% machine allowance. Performance rates were generally high in the light machine shop, but when we reach the assembly area the figures drop: 8

out of 19 workers in dial assembly, for example, made less than 100 performance in the second week. The third set of tables shows the percentage of achieved against measured hours, ie the extent to which workers achieved performance as measured under MTM, to be between 80 and 90% in meter assembly, 60-80% in RWB (programmers) and only 60% in dial assembly, as opposed to 110-20% in the light machine shop and just over 100% in the moulding and press shops. The average for the factory as a whole was just over 90%. The overall message of the figures is that while the majority of workers did achieve performance or a bonus, a substantial minority did not. From my own discussions with workers, this proportion is estimated at 20-25%. Some typical comments were:

"For the majority, people aren't able to do the number since it was retimed. They're probably getting the quantity but not the quality since MTM" (Meter Assembly worker, i). ("i" indicates comments obtained during interview, "o" during observation).

"I haven't made performance for the last two years - I just get the basic, since the jobs were retimed...The number is too high. They have a number which I don't think any human could do" (Dial Assembly worker, i).

In general it was not lack of willingness to do the work, but the sheer impossibility of "making the number" which was cited:

"They try to make out it's our fault we can't make performance, but you want to work, get your number up". (Dial Assembly Worker, o).

For those who could "make the number", the pressure of sheer hard work was clear. Workers made the following comments on effort levels:

"You've got to work for it, no doubt about it. If you don't make performance, you get a warning letter. You go right to it, no question of a breather. I'm wiped out at the end of the day" Press Operator, i.

"...You don't have time to go to the lavatory - if you lose five minutes, you can't make it up. All the time you're checking you've done enough for one hour - looking at your watch every five minutes" Programming Assembly worker, O.

"I always make 127. I set a goal for every hour - I like to work on the clock - 22 an hour. I can do it because I never spend a penny, never once get up, never talk or lift my head till lunchtime. I think everyone works like that." Programming Assembly worker, i.

The level of intensification of labour and the importance of labour time in these workers' perception of their work was clear. It can also be seen that there were frequent references to the advantage of being on the same job, or problems with changing jobs. The relation between performance levels and frequent job changes within the job families system was exemplified in workers' comments that:

"You have to be like an octopus to do this job - it's these job families!"

"You jump from job to job - what you make on one job you lose on another."

- both dial assembly workers, o.

In fact it was by now becoming clear that in addition to the 10 points which had already been withdrawn on waiting time (ie waiting time was now to be paid at 10 points below the operator's average performance) management had begun to "renege" on the training provisions which had been included in the job families agreement, or at least was arguing that workers had not fully understood them. Thus, while it had been implied in the agreement that workers would be trained on up to 10 jobs, this was now being interpreted as for example 10 hours' training for one job. Either way, in addition to the frustrations of trying to carry out jobs at speed for which they were untrained, the scheme was affecting workers in terms of drastic reductions in their bonus. In this sense increased labour flexibility through the job families system was experienced by workers not as an increase in managerial domination but directly in terms of their own intensified exploitation. The nexus between effort and reward, explored throughout the thesis, can now be further assessed as a central facet of worker experience at Landis and Gyr in terms of the areas now to be examined.



ii) Effort and Reward.

We have seen that effort is an overwhelmingly "presenting" factor in workers' perceptions of the labour process. We now go on to look at reward, and the relationship between the two factors, as possible further dimensions of workers' "quantitative" view of the labour process. Two hypotheses have already been proposed in this area in relation to the thesis as a whole and the case study in particular. These are firstly that exploitation is the central relationship in the operation of the capitalist labour process; and secondly that workers in the case study saw the labour process in terms of its quantitative rather than qualitative aspects. Looking at workers' comments on the issue of effort and reward helps us to explore both propositions.

a) "Making money". One aspect of this is the extent to which workers saw the labour process as a means, for them, of literally "making money". Thus just as management tended to see it primarily as a process of producing value rather than producing things (cf the preoccupation with "costs"), so workers showed an unsettling tendency to interpret "making" in terms of "money". A common experience was to ask a worker during observation what she was making and to receive an answer like "Oh, I don't make much on this job." Workers also frequently substituted "doing" for "making money" - for example "You could be switched around and not have done anything" (by which he meant "made any bonus") "all day because the rate is so high" (Press Operator, i).

b) "Making for myself, making for them"..

Workers saw the job both in terms of "the number" and in terms of its earnings equivalent. Both perceptions precluded any major concern with its qualitative content or process. Another example of the correlation between "making" and "making money" was the distinction which large numbers of workers made between labour time spent producing the amounts

specified under the MTM standards and labour time beyond this point, which was seen as time spent producing "for myself":

"I'm not really making anything for myself - I might earn 115 on one job, then 70 on another. I'm working for the company, not for myself"  
Programming Assembly worker, i.

"I'm putting in the effort I should be putting in, not the nerve-wracking stuff. Instead of myself, I'm making the company happy"

(Light machine shop worker, i). This worker clearly regarded the level of effort she would have to put in to make something "for herself" as far beyond what was acceptable. A second Light Machine Shop worker was more sanguine: "I'm working for the company and also for myself, it's a job and I'm grateful for that - for their interests and my interests as well."

In general, however, the "working for myself/working for the company" distinction was the occasion for disgust at the raw deal the workers felt they were getting:

"I think you're working for the company most of the time, because you don't get nothing - it's disgusting - it would be nice to look at your payslip and think, ah, for working hard I got this, but you get nothing"  
(Programming Assembly worker, o).

Another worker was explosive about the minor concessions made on "performance" after the strike:

"The stewards say the times are better but performances of 110 and thereabouts are rubbish - you're slogging your guts out for £3 a week and all for them - I'd rather take it easy..." (Meter Assembly worker, o).

The company/self distinction was further articulated by many workers in a sharp awareness of the profit motive:

"How do you feel about the job depends on the times - you know at the end of the day you're just producing for the company's profits, not for you - if it was fair you'd be doing a fair day's work for the company,

a fair day's work for you in the sense of making a wage. If you find you're not making for yourself some workers won't push themselves any further to let the company gain."

c) "More work for less money".

On the whole, however, comments on bonus were intermingled with those on effort and "performance" in a straightforward (if generally dissatisfied) analysis of the effort/reward relationship:

"They want more work out of you but they're not about to pay you for it. These days they want more work for less money" Programming Assembly Worker, o.

"The work is really very hard - they expect too much for what they pay" Dial Assembly worker, i.

"It's the money makes me do the number. On one week off this job, my bonus dropped. It's really killing, you don't get it for nothing" Programming Assembly, i.

A moulding shop worker posed the relationship in terms of a definite calculation:

"They might give you a 4% increase, but they'll take back 2-3% in terms of effort. Management is always pushing for more and more effort."

A further aspect of the discontent expressed by many workers was the feeling that conditions had become much worse over the last few years in this respect. As a Dial Assembly worker put it:

"It's all changed since (the works Director) came here. They've made it harder for the working class. I used to earn a bonus, but since we were retimed I've found it impossible to earn money."

"Things have now got very hard - I don't have a minute to turn - five minutes can make a big difference to the wages. I used to earn £30 bonus - I worked hard but got something for it. Now I'm working harder and getting less" meter assembly worker, i.

In their prioritisation of labour time, labour intensification and pay as primary features of their experience of the labour process, workers in effect evoked exploitation as defining the nature of that experience. This was clear both in the centrality of the issue to their comments on work and the number of comments which spontaneously addressed this facet of the labour process.

Whatever the evidence that both management and workforce saw the labour process primarily in terms of value production, however, it is not the intention to argue that the labour process, even under capitalism, actually is or could be a one-dimensional activity of "pure" value production. The point is that it is the domination of the capitalist labour process by the imperatives of value production that causes contradictions between these imperatives and the actual requirements of the concrete production process. Some of these contradictions are evident in the comments of workers on working methods, quality etc., looked at below.

iii) Working methods, worker knowledge, quantity versus quality.

There were ~~few~~ strong feelings on the issue of working methods, most workers reporting that, as one put it with a docility that would have pleased Taylor,

"I do the job the way I was trained in training school, there is only one way" (Light Machine Shop worker, o).

Another worker attributed this lack of discretion to the technical structuring of work:

"You have to do the job the way they tell you. There's no way you can do it quicker than the machine does, you've got the layout, you do it the way the layout says" (Press Operator, o).

It was clear that workers were less concerned with job content as such than with the relation of the work to timing and performance rating.

As a programming assembly worker put it in interview:

"I use the method shown - I don't change the method - it's the only method they show you. I don't mind how the job's done as long as I can earn performance."

A slightly different point of view nevertheless conveyed the same relationship between working methods and performance:

"Workers use their own little dodges - you find yourself doing better. If you did it the same way they showed you, you wouldn't make a bonus. But you find a little way to do it, you make something for yourself"

(Press operator, i). From these comments it was clear that workers potentially had a significant part to play in the organisation of working methods and assessment of problems of production and quality. We go on to explore this potential and the associated contributions in the following sections.

#### a) Worker Knowledge.

The workers' intimate knowledge of the job meant, of course, that they were much better qualified to suggest effective changes in method than management and even the foreman. That this knowledge remained unused, with the consequences for production engineering and efficient work organisation that we saw above (pp 188 ff ), can be explained in terms of a mutual dynamic of worker distrust and managerial disdain. In this sense the underlying antagonism between workers and management, while not the occasion for overt resistance, provided not only the soil for that resistance (see Chapter 4) but also a powerful bar to effective organisation of the labour process. The obstacles worked in several ways; one, which might be described as "peer-group pressure", was shown in an example from a meter assembly worker:

"I would tell the foreman about a new method but not the girls because there's a lot of jealousy there, they'd say I was showing off."

There was a case last week - I suggested to the girls on the bench that we had chutes for the parts - they didn't want to know - I went to Quality Control with the idea, the chargehand thought it was a good idea. I told him not to say it was my idea - the girls then welcomed it." Significantly, this reluctance to assist in the organisation of the labour process was attributed partly to the feeling that this was simply not part of the workers' sphere of responsibility:

"I do make suggestions, but I don't like poking my nose in, it's not my business, I could get into trouble. They've got engineers, if the engineers can't do it they're not going to get production. It's not the workers' job" Light Machine Shop worker, i.

As against this a positive hostility was expressed in terms of the opposing interests of workers and management:

"I would suggest better ways of doing the job but you don't get compensation so you don't bother, you keep it to yourself. They'd just use it against you - if you got something back, you might do it" (Moulding Shop worker, o).

Workers' reluctance to offer their suggestions was reinforced by the awareness that management was totally unconcerned about their views and experience:

"These new boxes - they just brought them along, they didn't ask us - they're no good. If they'd asked us, they would have had more idea about it. They don't ask the workers because they probably don't think we've got any intelligence. It's just done downstairs, they don't ask us - now there aren't enough boxes, the work's piling up" (Dial Assembly worker, i).

Finally, in spite of all these obstacles, some had offered suggestions, but had been rebuffed:

"I can think of more productive methods - yes, definitely. For

example the coil - you have to wrap it in your hand - you could just chop off the scrap. This tool could knock four heads off, not just one. I have made suggestions, but I'm recommended to put them in the suggestion book - they're not interested, so why should anyone else be interested? There's no response...The company doesn't take much notice of what you think - you're here to do your job and that's it"

Press Operator, i.

To sum up this section, it can be said that it was workers' conveptions of management and the role of management, and vice versa, that stood in the way of much of the interchange of information that should have been possible. In this sense the contradiction was more deepseated than the one we are about to look at, that between quantity and quality. It resembles the point made by Cressey and MacInnes about the contradiction between the oppression of the workforce and the need for its co-operation, with the difference that management did not seek the co-operation of the workforce, echoing the attitude of the workforce who on the whole did not see their interests as in the same sphere as those of management. Seeing production in terms of output rather than content, management did not seek workers' views because they simply did not regard it as part of the job of the workforce to do other than, merely, produce. This structuring of the labour process towards output was, more transparently, responsible for the contradictions between quantity and quality expressed by the workforce in their comments below.

#### b) Quality versus quantity

In the context of the campaign which had just been launched by the Quality Control manager which required operators to record problems in quality while carrying out their work, most respondents were scornful in their assessment of what they saw as totally conflicting

priorities:

"If they want the girls to produce better work, they should give them more time - they want quantity and quality. You do your best, but if they want accuracy they should give you more time" Light Machine Shop worker, i.

"They want production, not quality...they should be more exact about quality than quantity. They still want quantity no matter what - otherwise you're downstairs, you get three warnings...They're trying to push the operators too much - if they want quantity, they won't get quality" Light Machine Shop worker, i.

In the assembly department, the clearest demonstration of the clash between quantity and quality was the problem of bad parts coming through from manufacturing, this problem itself being caused by the pressures of the MTM/bonus system:

"There's bad parts coming through so we can't make bonus - it happens because the press operators are trying to make bonus."

"The parts are bad more oftenthan not - we're constantly struggling to get the parts to fit - there's a clash between quality and quantity" (Dial Assembly workers, o).

Finally, the somewhat wistful comment of the Programming Assembly worker quoted earlier showed the countervailing pressure of output even on a worker who clearly cared about quality for its own sake:

"I'm on loom soldering - it's interesting because no two looms are the same - I like the variety. The number is high - it takes some of the enjoyment out of it, I would like more time to do a perfect loom. It's not as good as I would like, I feel I'm rushing and rushing...."

These comments speak for themselves in indicating the competing pressures of reducing labour time and improving the quality of the product, in which the latter clearly lost out. The economics of this,



if not the logic, were sound; speaking to the Dial Assembly Shop steward during the strike about the remeasured MTM system, and being told once again that a major problem ~~was~~ the high number of bad parts being sent from other departments, I put the point that this appeared to conflict with company objectives, to which she replied that the company was still producing three times the amount they had before the new system was introduced.

At the same time the comments of one of the skilled workers in the toolroom indicated from a different point of view some of the conflicting pressures which continually dogged effective production. Speaking of the organisation of work in his section, he said:

"There should be more planning in the toolroom, but there are too many breakdowns, etc. You start to plan ahead for new jobs but then - 'urgent job' again because there's been a machine breakdown. The breakdowns happen because of MTM - use of the tool is the secondary factor. In the past, they would put use of the tool before output. MTM has ruined tooling. They're not interested in the tools themselves. Twenty years ago if a press operator noticed a change in the blanks he'd stop the machine, now he'll go on producing for the bonus - it's wasted money, the firm could pay more wages out of their profits."

This worker's comments pinpointed clearly the contradictions between the firm's pressing need for immediate output and the longer-term requirements of planning and capital investment. The counterposing of the bonus as an incentive to the notion that the firm could pay the same amount of wages "out of profits" belies the "piecework myth" with its shrewd suggestion that the bonus itself made no difference to the firm's wage costs. Thus the existence of the bonus is not an attempt by the firm to save labour costs through a possible reduction in bonus when workers fail to earn a bonus, but to increase performance to a level which,

in this worker's view, was counterproductive.

In a way this sums up the whole dilemma the firm was in. They had to increase worker performance to certain - precisely quantified - levels, or else, as the Personnel Manager had pointed out with this example of the Japanese firm, they were out of the competition. They simply did not have time, and for the same reasons did not have resources, to rely on anything but intensification of labour to get them out of their still somewhat backward competitive position. And indeed the remeasurement exercise had, as the Personnel Manager put it, "pulled the company round". The problems were firstly that, as we saw above, the raised output requirements had intensified labour to such a degree that workers were often simply unable to attain the targets, and secondly that, as the toolmaker quoted above made clear, they led directly to the sort of problems with work organisation, quality control and loss of worker knowledge which have just been discussed.

The worker responses examined so far can be said to reflect less a fundamental protest at the alienation of labour and removal of worker discretion than a thwarted practical struggle to attain frequently prohibitive norms of labour intensification. Workers also had a perception of the labour process as, literally, "making money".

Although "attitudinal" factors more familiar to industrial sociology were important in, for example, demonstrating a basic hostility towards management which made workers reluctant to positively offer co-operation, in none of the response is a clear pattern of organised and overt worker resistance around elements of the content of the labour process apparent. One of the central objectives of this thesis has been to explore what the issues are around which worker resistance does centre, and to follow through the implications of this content of resistance. These themes are now taken up in the final section of the report.

iii) Willingness to Work, Fatalism, The Triggers of Resistance.

The basis and content of worker resistance are explored in this section. We begin by looking more closely at the extent to which worker resistance may be focussed around a basic protest at the need to surrender labour to an employer, which is examined in the context of "willingness to work". In the following two sections we look at the paradoxical connections between an apparent resignation by workers in the face of what are seen as impossible odds, and the sudden "explosion" into resistance. Finally we present a brief account of the strike which was the vehicle of this resistance, examining the issues at its centre and those which surfaced during the course of the strike and presented some crucial obstacles to the workers' success.

a) Willingness to Work.

We begin this section with three theoretical points of reference. Firstly, there has been a suggestion in the literature (Friedman, 1977 Carchedi, 1977) that workers resist, at the most fundamental level, the alienation of their labour to the employer. Secondly, writers such as Edwards and Littler & Salaman, as we argued in Chapter 2, have largely defined the "control" issue within the labour process in terms of the distinction between labour power and labour, and the difficulty faced by the employer in translating one into the other, without specific attention being given to the level of labour intensification. Thirdly we refer, more in line with the ensuing argument, to the invocation of Marx's concept of the "dull compulsion of labour" by Abercrombie, Hill and Turner in their Dominant Ideology Thesis (1984). It is argued that it is not power-centred coercion but simple economic necessity, recognised by workers in a spirit of "pragmatic acceptance", which prevails upon them to surrender their labour.

In addition, in relation to this it has been hypothesised in the current thesis (see Chapters 2 & 4) that there is a level of effort which is

"acceptable" to workers and up to which they display an uncoerced willingness to, or acceptance of, work. It is at particular levels of high intensification of labour, such as those at Landis & Gyr, that workers may "resist" in the sense of being unable, unwilling, or able only at great cost to themselves to work at such levels. The comments from workers below demonstrate a clear "willingness to work" up to this point:

"I work just as hard when I'm on a 'no time' job because I'm not lazy, I give a fair deal...It doesn't affect the work I'm doing - I always work, always try my best" Press Operator, i.

"People are conscientious, they carry on doing their job. You do it because it's your job" (Moulding shop worker).

"...It's work. Once I'm on a job I try my best, work as hard as I can. We have to, even if you're not on the bonus they pay you, so you have to do the reasonable thing - once I start to work I just work...I'm here to work, what the foreman gives me I just do."

"I just keep on in the same way as if there was no time on the job. Some people on a no-time job might slow down, but I just work normal because everyone has to work for a living - I like to put in a fair day's work - no one will pay you for it if you don't work."

Even a worker who emerged as one of the most forceful supporters of the strike expressed the following view:

"I'm the type that would do it for myself and the firm, I felt just as much for the firm as for myself - if I was asked to stay late, I would. Most people don't give a damn, that's the fault of management..." (meter assembly worker, i).

Comments like the last may seem to go beyond "pragmatic acceptance" to a positive affirmation of the duty to work, the need of the firm to prosper etc. However, whether "willingness to work" is expressed

in terms of a neutral component of the employment relationship or as a moral obligation, the overall result in relation to the content of worker resistance is the same - the issue of the surrender of labour in itself is not made a focus of that resistance. This point is not made to argue a theory of "consent" but to specify what resistance is about (and to emphasise the fact that the issues concerned were fundamental enough to overcome any minimal moral obligation to the employer). What brought the workers at Landis & Gyr out on strike was not having to work, but having to work hard, so hard that they couldn't "make the number" - and even this was not resisted until two of them were threatened with dismissal as part of the company sanctions against low performance. Until then, as we saw, the high work standards were viewed with resentment and incredulity, but were not rebelled against for their own sake.

b) Fatalism.

Part of the slowness to resist can be said to lie in the huge practical, political and economic obstacles confronting workers who may actually contemplate taking action against an employer. To take up another theoretical reference, arguments such as those of eg Elger, Stark and Friedman, which place class struggle as a central determinant in the development of the labour process, often appear to suggest a level of explicit "protest" against capitalist control of the labour process which is in fact lacking in most even overt worker struggles. While inherent antagonism is built into the capitalist labour process, workers are not hot-headed rebels grabbing at every opportunity to fight the "class struggle" on the shop floor. Rather, they are pragmatic participants in a bargain which delivers to them their means of making a living. It takes quite a lot to shift workers from this cautious awareness of "reality", the economic and practical parameters of which are again expressed in the comments of workers from Landis & Gyr:

"I see this firm as multinational. It has the power to close down this factory. The workers won't come out - they can't do anything. Every shop sees things differently. Workers won't act because they're worried about their jobs. Hang on here as tight as you can - you've got no choice - you can't go anywhere. Other firms pay even lower wages" (Press Operator, o).

"Do we work hard? Oh yeah, since the last pay round everybody puts in a lot more effort. Management can get away with things because of unemployment. People won't stand up for their rights because of the climate outside...I doubt if they'll do anything about the bad working conditions. Knowing what's out there you'll suffer here instead of out there. Everybody is well aware of the circumstances. If there was a strong leadership from the trade union side everybody would want to do something about it. The stewards are aware of the situation, but at the moment their hands are being tied. I'm not blaming them, it's the situation outside" (Moulding shop worker, i).

Workers in the assembly department broadened the analysis to bring in the general political situation (as indeed did a large number of workers):

"These problems we have here is her fault, Mrs Thatcher. She's made the unemployment and all. Workers here think they can't do nothing, they'll lose their job" (2 dial assembly workers, o).

Yet any potential for resistance was viewed pessimistically by the Dial Assembly shop steward (interviewed one day before the strike broke out):

"The main 'shouts' are about times on jobs and bad parts - it's ridiculous what you're supposed to work with. Who gives the work, who takes it away. Some days there's three or four people coming with problems, some days it's totally quiet. They put a lot on the stewards, expect the steward to sort everything out, they just want to carry on

working, won't do anything. I can see people just putting up with things - they've given up now, they've lost a lot of interest in the last six months to a year, they've gone down rapidly from what they'd do before. They're worried about the work situation, they're now told do it or get out, there's the door. If they do anything they won't get anywhere, they'll lose money. If I'm talking to my department, I'll say we should do something about it, but we won't go out if other departments won't go out, we'll just lose money. People are afraid of losing their jobs, they feel why bother, what's the good of it."

Despite this steward's personal willingness to fight, she had caught the prevailing mood of fatalism in the face of external economic realities which characterised all the workers' comments on resistance. Of all those who raised the issue, either spontaneously or in answer to a question, not one expressed a militant determination to go on strike - in fact the comments quoted show overwhelmingly the direction of thought in the factory. Thirteen out of 45 workers "observed" or interviewed raised the issue of resistance, all of them from a "nothing you can do" perspective.

### c) Triggers of Resistance

We have already discussed (Chapter 4) the important distinction between overt and covert conflict. One of the questions this thesis sets out to investigate is what are the triggers that actually push workers who may be resentful, "alienated" but nevertheless passive into active resistance to the employer. What are the issues that workers cannot but struggle over? Looking at this question may give us some indications as to the class significance of "everyday" struggles.

In the case of Lanids & Gyr, the comments just quoted, typical of the workforce's attitude of "There's nothing you can do" were all recorded during the two-week run-up to what turned out to be the

most major strike in the factory's history. The shop steward's analysis of her members' potential for action was in fact made one day before the strike broke out. To get some idea of the issues which pushed workers into what was clearly an explosion of resistance, let us examine the factors which workers themselves linked to the question: "But what can you do about it?" Of the thirteen workers who commented (negatively) on the potential for resistance, nine related the problems in the factory to effort or the effort/reward relationship; the rest simply mentioned the recession and its effect on the workforce as their first comment about work, making it part of a general political overview of the firm's situation. This emphasis on effort and its interrelation with reward is perhaps predictable in view of the preponderance of this relationship in workers' experience. However, it is worth reiterating that "control" issues in the sense of lack of autonomy, coercion to work, etc, made no appearance in workers' conceptions of the range of issues eligible for resistance; only one "non-effect" issue, the bad working environment, was in fact mentioned in this connection, and even here followed the spontaneous citing of the relationship between increased intensification of labour and unemployment. Three workers who extensively discussed lack of autonomy and managerial oppression did not link these grievances to any potential resistance.

It may seem paradoxical, in a section looking at "Resistance", to devote almost the whole of the argument to the analysis of why workers did not resist. But what is being argued here is precisely that worker resistance is a paradoxical, or at least a contradictory phenomenon. Despite the resentment that simmered throughout the factory, workers did not take a calculated, strategic decision to act against the employer. When they did act, the basis of the resistance was clear, and the depth of feeling apparent, in workers' spontaneous comments during the strike meetings. But the push towards action was, as it were, delivered to them by a



management action which related centrally to the focus of potential conflict in the factory; two workers were threatened with dismissal for low performance.

Thus, while the situation was itself inherently explosive, the workers did not of themselves decide to set off the explosion. The seeds of conflict lay not in the overt political consciousness of the workers but in the contradictions endemic in the capitalist labour process to which the workers essentially reacted. We have attempted to chart the political implications of this dynamic of worker response in our last chapter. We can now illustrate this point with a brief account of the strike and the issues it raised.

d) The strike.

The dispute began as a spontaneous stoppage of work by operators in the Assembly Department after it was heard that two meter assembly workers had been threatened with dismissal for low performance. A meeting called that afternoon decided unanimously to stay out and to come in only for a strike meeting the following Monday.

The dispute lasted for two weeks, but remained confined to the assembly department, with no clear attempt being made to call the manufacturing workers out. During this time three strike meetings were held and management made a number of concessions, including withdrawal of the particular warnings that had been issued, investigation of the two jobs concerned, and the setting up of departmental working parties involving shop floor workers in order to look into the times of jobs in general. The strikers finally returned after the intervention of the full-time district union official, although feelings were mixed and many still argued that they should have stayed out.

Our assessment of the strike centres on the following issues:

a) What the strikers thought it was about (including comments recorded after the strike); b) the character of the shop steward leadership and the failure to extend the strike to the manufacturing department; c) the theoretical and practical obstacles that stood in the way of the strikers' determined pursuit of their ends.

a) "Better times on jobs!"

One notable feature of strike meetings was the counterpoint between the stewards' insistence (the meetings were chaired and dominated by the convenor and his immediate deputies) that the dispute was about the specific warnings that had been given to the two workers, and the strikers' spontaneous feeling that the issue centred on the times themselves, a feeling which coalesced into the demand for "No more warnings". Thus, while there was concern about redundancy, the strikers were more focussed on the structural situation which allowed management to issue the threats in the first place as a sanction against low performance. This led, initially, to an interesting interchange in the first strike meeting in which the convenor attempted to reassure the workers by arguing, "The company isn't going to want to get rid of all of you - between you you share years of experience."

The strikers, with a rather more accurate assessment of the situation, shouted back -

"Oh, they can get anyone in off the street."

The gap between the stewards' position of negotiating about the existing warnings and the strikers' repudiation of the performance standards and of the sanction itself, which put the whole managerial strategy into question, was brought out in a direct clash between stewards and strikers towards the end of the second strike meeting. After a protracted discussion on the period management had offered for investigation into the

threatened jobs, which both the strikers and some shop stewards saw as insufficient, the convenor put it to the meeting: "If they're prepared to withdraw the warnings, you're prepared to go back? Let's be clear. Do you resume back to normal working?"

At this the meeting dissolved into confusion, with workers obviously feeling that a return to work would threaten their underlying stance on "times". There were shouts of "Proper times on jobs!" and "We can't make it, just can't make it". Another shop steward then intervened, "Let's get it straight. If these warnings are withdrawn, there's no reason why you shouldn't return to normal working." At this there were further protests of "Yes there is!", "No more warnings", "We can't make the jobs" etc. A meter assembly worker summed it up:

"You know how much that is, 90 performance? They don't like low performance, the people on the floor don't like low performance either." Here she was clearly referring to the articulation of what were felt to be impossibly high performance levels with the low earnings suffered by most of the assembly workers.

Some of the differences between the shop stewards' perspective and the more immediate response of the strikers are examined below. One clear issue uniting the strikers, however, was the universality of their experience of struggling with high performance targets, which led to the feeling that the warnings "could have happened to any one of us". This argument was put by programming assembly workers waiting in the canteen before the vote to strike, and was echoed by assembly workers in their later assessments of the dispute:

"It's my personal opinion that the same thing could have happened to me - I was down for a low performance letter because of switching jobs" (Programming Assembly worker, i).

"The strike? The same thing could have happened to me - Joy'd been here 5 years, if she can't do the job no one can" (Dial Assembly worker, i).

"The same thing could have happened to any one of us - if I was taken off my job, I'd get a letter for low performance, because on some jobs you just can't - people aren't lazy, you just can't do it" (Programming assembly worker).

Thus it was the times on jobs, and the shared and potentially interchangeable experience of difficulty with them, that for the strikers lay at the core of the dispute.

b) "Most union organisers are indirect...."

The comment that a press operator had earlier made, talking about the obstacles to effective resistance, that "Most union organisers are indirect, they're not on bonus. Anything management tells them, they'll agree, they're not losing" summed up a central aspect of the conduct of the strike and indeed the organisation of the factory. The domination of the negotiating committee, the shop steward body that conducted discussions with management, by maintenance and craft workers (only one member of the committee was an assembly shop steward) compounded the conservatism that was a product of their long entrenchment with a total absence of the experience that had sent the MTM workers on to the picket lines. This showed itself not only in the insistence, noted above, that the dispute was about the relatively "negotiable" issue of the two threatened workers, but also in the attitude towards approaching management in general. From the beginning, the convenor had argued that "you can't dictate" to management, and was clearly working within a framework of continual preparedness to make concessions.

This mingled with a somewhat lofty attitude towards the strikers, in which it was made clear, through a semblance of trade union bureaucrat parlance, that the leadership was a long way from identifying itself wholeheartedly with the strikers' cause:

"We've tried to get something - if you want to stay out, tell us... You're the Jones losing money. You tell us what you want" (convenor).  
"It's up to you people what you're going to do" (deputy convenor).  
In general, the divorce between a cautious institutionalisation of conflict and any fullblooded solidarity with the strikers was articulated through the notion of "negotiating under duress". In the face of the strikers' insistence that "Until they take these warnings back we'll do nothing" (meter assembly shop steward) the convenor complained, "It's very hard for us to do anything while you're out", to which the branch chair added, "Management don't like negotiating under duress."

This culminated, as we saw above, in a direct clash between the workers' incipient challenge of existing relations of production and the stewards' philosophy of negotiation within an established structure: "I don't believe in negotiations, we should stick to what we want" (meter assembly worker).

"If they withdraw the warnings, what then?" (deputy convenor).

"No more warnings!" (shouts from workers).

"You might as well forget it, you'd be talking for ever and a day. No discussions, nothing at all. Not a cat in hell's chance" (deputy convenor).

The stewards' rejection of the workers' stand as essentially amateurish went along with an uncritical embracing of many of the company's perspectives. This was clear not only on the issue of performance itself (the convenor had argued at the first meeting that the company had "got into a profit situation" through remeasurement - to which his audience retorted "On the operators' backs") but also in the overall support given to management's rather than the strikers' definition of the situation:

"If the working party was set up, the company would come out better than you would. If a CSEU/EEF agreement on performance is signed, there's nothing to stop them dismissing you" (Moulding shop steward).

This lukewarm attitude to the dispute was shown most seriously in the failure to bring out the manufacturing department in support of the strikers. Thus at the first strike meeting the convenor finally yielded, after resisting for a long time, to pressure to hold a mass meeting of MM departments that had not come out, by saying that he would get the departments to clock out for a meeting. However, there was no subsequent evidence that this meeting, or any attempt to call it, actually took place. At the same time it was clear, from discussions with workers and shop stewards during the strike, that substantial support did exist for the stoppage:

"If you all come together with the members, management would climb down very easily, because you're taking away their bread and butter, taking the blood away from them. This dispute might just be a start..."  
Light Machine Shop steward.

"It could be me next - I'd come out of the shop did" Press Operator.  
"We haven't had much information on what the strike is about - we need a mass meeting. There's been no guidance from the shop stewards. The times are ridiculous, we're doing much more for much less - if they bring this in it threatens all of us. I support the 'no warnings' stand because if this was brought in all jobs would be threatened"  
Moulding Shop worker.

At the same time the feeling by even the more militant shop stewards that it was not their place to exert pressure on the manufacturing workers ("You can't put pressure on - the decision has to be left up to them" Dial Assembly shop steward) combined with the usual sectionalism, accusations of previous treachery etc., conspired

to keep the manufacturing workers passive. As the Light Machine Shop steward, one of the few who had made an attempt to get his section out, put it:

"I said at the meeting, Let's forget the past. Still the members said the agreement shouldn't have been signed...People were a bit reluctant. They could see the warnings could apply to them, but they were reluctant because they were against the union for forcing the agreement through... Management has now got everything they want - they're making these people suffer, and reducing earnings."

c) "He'll just tear you to pieces".

Finally, however, the factor that most weakened the strikers' resolve was their endorsement, against all experience, of the "scientific" legitimacy of MTM standards. This emerged most clearly in the discussion, during the second strike meeting, of the management proposal to set up "working parties" which would investigate the existing performance standards in relation to specific jobs:

"They've given you the working party, the warnings frozen etc. The people they put on the committees (working parties) aren't really strong enough to face those they've got to face - they need training" (convenor)

"Working party? Last time the working party was thrown out - people didn't know MTM" Dial Assembly worker.

"People have to have knowledge of MTM, procedures etc. It's no good arguing about your own job, he'll just tear you to pieces" (convenor).

"Who've we got to do this?"

"Not enough experiences - how will we know if they've got enough experience?" - strikers.

Thus, while the experience of not being able to make the times was the main driving force behind the strike, the workers' acceptance of

the objective validity of measured work targets echoed managerial perspectives in its conceptualisation of the labour process as primarily about numbers, not qualitative job content. The most significant thing about the above interchange was the workers' conviction, bolstered by the convenor, that they were incapable of mustering the technical expertise demanded by MTM. This was one of the central difficulties facing the direct workforce; the workers knew they couldn't make the times, but the system said they could. The system, with its panoplies of consultants, tables, calculators and stop watches, possessed a technical mystique the workers could never hope to challenge; surely, being so "scientific", it must be right. The system possessed this authority even in the direct face of the workers' experience; thus the strikers, despite their continual protests at not being able to make the times, were thrown into confusion by the spectre of "knowing MTM" that confronted them with the proposal of the working party (the convenor's comment that they would be "torn to pieces" seemed only too apt). MTM had, indeed, proved its unassailability even to the probings of a formally approved "trade union rep on timings." This position had existed for some three years, since the beginning of remeasurement, but the present incumbent (interviewed during the strike) had rarely managed to make any effective intervention on behalf of the workforce:

"It's not often I manage to get anything out of them. Only on four or five out of thirty or forty cases in two years have I managed to get any time. MTM gets it all buttoned up before I get there. I only do it from time to time, I don't get any practice. I've checked the job, and there's no more time to be found. You can't just go down and say, This time is tight, you need proof...There's three girls' jobs I checked, they were earning 70 performance, the foreman knew the workers weren't real slackers. I spent days on those four or five jobs and I couldn't find any extra time - on some jobs time could be taken off...Finding



extra time - if there's no extra moments which aren't accounted for by MTM, you can't find extra time."

It was clear that everyday concepts like not being able to do a job in the time given found no place in the predetermined rigidities of MTM - "time" within this system meant a different and more artificial thing than it did in the world outside. While, as we see in the figures in the Appendix, it is clear that only a minority of workers actually could not make performance at all, those who did, or even made bonus, did so by working, as the timings rep said, "like a blur" - so fast that it was difficult to study them. It was for this reason that the assembly workers, at any rate, felt overwhelmingly that the threatened dismissals for not rising to the requirements of MTM were "something that could happen to any one of us".

The direct conflict between workers' experience of the labour process and the managerially imposed output norms was, as we have said, the basis of the strike. At the same time, and for the same reasons, it made the strike itself ultimately unwinnable, other than by overturning the whole structure of management and ownership in the factory. Eventually, the workers would have to go back, but the question of how to produce an apparently acceptable settlement was difficult.

There was confusion and uncertainty, but in the end it was the introduction of the district official, brought in to persuade the strikers to "be reasonable" and hold over their heads the prospects of the firm's closure, which proved decisive. Clearly it was impossible for the strikers to win their actual demand ("no more warnings") which struck centrally at the firm's strategy of tying the purchase of labour power to a specified level of production; they were also fatally weakened by the failure of the other, slightly less hardhit, MTM departments to join them in their stoppage. Nevertheless, the strikers had gained

some concessions. The two workers had not been sacked; and they had been offered the joint working parties, which in the hands of those more sure of themselves than the MTM workforce might have been turned into a significant negotiating weapon (in the event they died out after a few weeks). Basically, as the strikers themselves saw it, they had "taken a stand", they had "refused to let management walk all over them", and, as a result, management had been forced to, however slightly, retreat. The war of attrition continued.

The significance of the strike was two-fold. Firstly, in its expression of the seemingly inevitable surfacing of contradictions within the capitalist labour process; secondly, in its symbolisation of the bedrock of resistance which, however apparently passive the workforce, was activated by the impact of the firm's requirements on the workers' living standards. The shop steward organisation in the factory, without which, as the convenor had put it in an earlier interview, "this firm would run so sweetly" was a parallel example of this basic intransigence. For all their conservatism, the stewards' position as workers and representatives of workers inevitably gave them an understanding and awareness of the problems of the shop floor:

"...The main issue is money. People come here for a wage, to work in comfort. Most issues you get are money - bonus is the number one problem. Everyone keeps moaning about the bonus earnings. Ten per cent of the factory isn't achieving bonus, 20% is getting the minimum, £1-5 a week. The majority of workers are in the range around 120 performance. Even those on maximum bonus are still being short-changed - they think they're having to work too hard for that bit of money. The new times were brought in gradually - now they're humanised robots" (convenor in an earlier interview).

The existence of the stewards in the factory was the organisational expression of this ongoing antagonism, the irreducible level of conflict that revolved around the central dynamic of effort and reward, performance and profit. A confused and contradictory expression, as was the strike itself, but nevertheless a representative force which meant that management, even with the bit between its teeth as was now the case, was still treading a dangerous path with the increasingly common introduction of new working arrangements "over the heads" of the shop stewards. This tendency, which was becoming clear towards the end of my time at the factory, had meant reversals on training time and flexi-time agreements, and was now, in the aftermath of the strike, leading to the strict enforcement of a "bench-to-bench" 9-minute tea-break which overstepped (in an echo of the then recent British Leyland dispute) the custom-and-practice time allowed for "washing up".

The danger of this strategy for management was that it brought the stewards closer to their grassroots, defensive role. This increasing "filling in of the pores" of the labour process, along with a growing managerial arrogance, was resented by the workforce, who began pushing the equally indignant shop stewards back to their older, more "confrontationist" position. The situation at the close of research was balancing on something of a knife edge of competing class forces. The management, increasingly confident, was beginning to behave more and more as if the stewards didn't exist. But the stewards did, and the kind of issues which management were now imposing over their heads were precisely the kind which give workplace representation its meaning and rationale. The stewards' ideological subservience, and their confusion in the face of managerial sophistication, prevented them from clearly seeing it in that way; but their class position meant that that was what they did.

Conclusions on Worker Response.

The foregoing provides some evidence that workers saw the labour process in quantitative rather than qualitative terms, that is that their primary points of reference were those of "performance" and the effort/reward relationship rather than job content, autonomy/discretion, skill etc. In this sense hypotheses

b) Workers would experience the labour process primarily in terms of quantity rather than quality of labour, and

c) Resentment/resistance would occur primarily over economic issues centred on the effort/reward relationship

are tentatively confirmed. The research also showed that overt resistance was provoked by economic issues reflecting central contradictions rather than by any general desire for "control".

In this study some of the major points made by writers on the labour process were set against the experience and response of workers in an existing "direct production" context characterised by detailed work measurement, extreme division and specialisation of labour, and a calculated interlocking of newer, more intensified working practices with subsistence. The preoccupations of writers such as Elger with work content, of Cressey and MacInnes with the contradictory requirement for worker co-operation, and of Friedman, Edwards et al with worker resistance to the alienation of their labour, are set against the empirical realities of a work situation in which none of these areas was a significant focus for either managerial strategy or worker response. Indeed, the overwhelming meaning of the production process for both "sides" was quantitative rather than qualitative, and as we saw, such quantitative imperatives were forced upon the two groups, rather than being the result of deliberate choice between two equally feasible alternatives, through competitive pressures on one

side and the struggle for subsistence on the other.

In this sense not only the hypotheses on worker response but our initial hypothesis regarding management, that their primary concerns would be material rather than political, are confirmed in the research. Moreover, the dynamic of management/worker relations put forward in our theoretical arguments as stemming from the underlying structuring of production towards valorisation was if anything "over-confirmed" by the situation at Landis & Gyr. The maximalised norms of output ordained by MTM and their direct link with the company's profit levels imposed a quantitative straitjacket on the labour process in which every method and every movement were tailored to the requirements of valorisation. In this situation any suggestion of a central political contestation of "control" or preoccupation by workers with the content and ownership of their labour appears increasingly irrelevant.

We set out to "test" empirically whether, within a range of variables, worker response would fall closer to the political or the material end of the spectrum. In each case it was found that, of necessity, material issues both constructed experience and governed response; and this was also true, ultimately, in determining the "triggers of resistance" that finally pushed a generally passive and fatalistic workforce into overt conflict. In this sense the theoretical arguments set out in chapter 5 regarding the dynamic and explosive nature of worker resistance were empirically confirmed. At the same time the uneven and essentially spontaneous nature of worker response was paralleled by a "firefighting" approach on the part of a management unable to subordinate its requirements of value production to any concern with, or acknowledgement of, the position of its workforce.

We go on now, in our second case study, to examine a labour process structured equally centrally by considerations of value, but in which this structuring and its associated contradictions emerged in a somewhat different form.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Case Study 2

Our second case study was carried out in the Wembley, West London branch of the British Oxygen Company, a branch once central to BOC's operations in the Southern Region, but at the time of the research, as we shall see, undergoing some decline. The research was carried out over approximately the same period, and using the same interviewing methods and questions, as in our previous study at Landis & Gyr.

Landis & Gyr is only one factory, and in approaching the very different circumstances of a branch of the massive BOC combine it was by no means certain that the results obtained in our first case study would be repeated. There were two factors about BOC Wembley which underlined this doubt; the use of process rather than product technology, and Wembley's membership of a vast conglomerate with reserves far exceeding those of Landis & Gyr. In this light we were concerned to show that the central hypotheses of the thesis could nevertheless be sustained - viz:

- a) the activities and objectives of management would express the overall priority of valorisation through a primary concern with such factors as intensification of labour, reduction of socially necessary labour time, and the general structuring of the labour process towards the production of value in terms of the calculation and imposition of quantitative norms of production;
- b) workers in their turn would be concerned with equally quantitative issues, ie subsistence, levels of labour intensification, and the relationship between them. These issues would be more central to worker experience of the labour process than for example the qualitative content of work or any contestation of the provision of labour as such;
- c) the areas of resentment and "triggers of resistance" for workers

would focus on the overall exigencies of "making a living", ie pay, earnings enhancement, job security etc, rather than on the more subjective and political issues emphasised by writers on the labour process.

In undertaking the case study at BOC, we expected to find the same overall prevalence of economistic concerns both amongst workers and management as at Landis & Gyr, but perhaps less sharply focussed around a central effort/reward nexus in what was after all a less directly "productive" context. In general, a less structured set of relationships around the production of surplus value was anticipated. Given the relative "looseness" of the relationships between labour process, subsistence and surplus value involved in a process plant with a relatively stable profit base, the greater potential for more "sophisticated" forms of conflict centred around issues of managerial domination and the "control" of work was recognised. Had such concerns been found to be paramount, the major theoretical propositions of our thesis would, of course, have been seriously undermined.

These propositions - summed up in the overall hypothesis that both managerial objectives and worker response are primarily structured by quantitative and economic factors - were, as we saw, substantially confirmed by the study at Landis & Gyr. Here a major dispute had indeed spontaneously broken out over the issue of "performance" which had been shown to be the central dynamic operating in management/worker relations. However, in our second study, while no such dramatic conflict erupted, the major axes of management/worker relations were nevertheless revealed to be structured around the same central point of profit and subsistence. The particular pattern through which these relationships were expressed was in itself highly symbolic of the quantitative priorities and contradictions on which the thesis has focussed, and will be examined in detail in the presentation of our findings.



Productive Context, Current Situation, Recent Changes

The major difference between the productive setting provided by our new case study and that of the last was that between process and production. While the Landis & Gyr workers moulded bakelite cases, pressed out screws and assembled these components into a finished product, the dispensers, cylinder fillers and sorters and fork lift drivers at BOC Wembley simply processed gases from bulk liquid form into smaller transportable cylinders, and then loaded these cylinders to be "ferried" longer or shorter distances to customers in the surrounding areas.

The workforce at the Wembley depot consisted first of all of the (nominally) six dispensers (in reality four) who piped off the liquid gases from bulk containers which were still, at the start of the research, arriving by train from the Northern plant where the gas was produced. The research was carried out at a time when, amongst many other changes, the dispensing and transport of liquid gases was due to be centralised at Thame rather than Wembley. The arrival of the final train to bring a bulk delivery was thus witnessed during the period of the research; an event which in its turn put into grave question the jobs of the four dispensers.

The dispensers attached pipes to the tanks on the train; the liquid gas was then either transferred to huge cooling towers, the steam from which made the plant easily identifiable from a distance, or piped directly into the tanks on the backs of the "liquid" lorries. From the cooling towers the processed gas was piped to the various areas of cylinder filling, of which the largest was the central filling area, but which also included for example the compressing area in which gas was prepared and filled for aircraft.

The central filling area, which employed the largest group of workers on the site, was the result of the integration, in 1979, of the three original "docks" - those handling argon, oxygen and nitrogen. This integration had been accompanied, or shortly preceded by, the introduction of "pallet-

isation" in which the cylinders for the gases, rather than being loaded directly on to the lorries by hand, were placed on wooden pallets which could be transported by fork lift truck either to the lorries or, when empty, to the filling shed. Finally, at the same time as the transfer to the Central Filling Area, the filling process itself was computerised.

The impact of these changes, and of changes in other work areas detailed below, will be dealt with more fully in the relevant sections. Meanwhile, we go on to list the other workgroups on whom the research focussed.

These were, respectively, the cylinder test operatives, also recently affected by computerisation; the fork lift truck drivers who transported pallets to and from the lorries and from the test shop to the central filling area; the site services workers, who dealt with repair and maintenance jobs around the site and who were the most flexible group of workers; and, of course, the lorry drivers. These last were divided into three groups, VCH or cylinder drivers who took 5-, 8- or 10-pallet vehicles out on local rounds, the "ferry" drivers, using articulated lorries with trailers, who drove longer distances with 16-18 pallet loads, and finally the "cryospeed" drivers, taking small samples of liquid nitrogen or argon to firms in the area to help them decide on the best use of these gases within their production processes. Of these workgroups, the proportions interviewed were as follows:

Central Filling Area (cylinder fillers and sorters)	12 of 13
Fork Lift Truck drivers	4 of 6
Cylinder Test operatives	4 of 6
Site Services workers	5 of 9
Dispensers	4 of 5
Compressors	3 of 4
Cylinder drivers	2 of 19
Liquid drivers	1 of 7

These groups of workers were chosen for their involvement in the most directly "productive" areas and for the semi-skilled nature of their work.

Thus for example site service and cylinder test workers were interviewed, despite their inclusion by BOC in the category of "Technical Services" workers, rather than the vehicle maintenance workers also included in this category whose work contained some craft elements. Other groups of workers thus omitted were engineering maintenance craftsmen and ancillary workers such as those in the canteen. For similar reasons, the women working in the scheduling office were also excluded, even though their current employment prospects posed significant issues with the introduction of computerisation.

The main focus of research, then, was on what was known as the "Operations and Distribution" department, one of three departments into which the Wembley branch was structured; in addition to Technical Services, there was also the Commercial department, which handled orders and sales and the workforce of which was white collar apart from two men who served on what was known as the "Bearer Dock", rolling cylinders on and off a concrete deck in the old-fashioned manner for individual calling customers.

The management and supervisory structure followed the lines of these three departments. There was an overall Branch Manager with responsibility for the whole operation, with each department in turn headed by its own manager. Beneath this layer, at least in the Operations/Distribution and Technical Services departments with which the research was the most concerned, there was a considerable additional level of supervision, including in the case of "Ops/Dist" two Cylinder foremen with beneath them two Central Filling supervisors, one supervisor for the compressors, and two Transport foremen overseeing the drivers; in Technical Services there were a Site Services and a Cylinder test supervisor in the areas with which we were concerned, as well as an Engineering Maintenance foreman and a foreman for the department as a whole (who also doubled as works engineer). Of these managers and supervisors the following were interviewed:

Branch Manager, Operations/Distribution Manager, Technical Services Manager,

two Central Filling Area foremen, two Transport foremen, one Technical services foreman, one Site Services supervisor, one Cylinder Test supervisor and one Compressors supervisor. The branch and regional personnel managers were also interviewed. As in our previous case study, the findings from these discussions with management will be presented before we examine the response of the workforce and their representatives.

The above, then, was the employment structure of the Wembley branch of BOC, numbering roughly 175 employees, as it existed at the time of the research (Spring, 1985). However, many changes, principally affecting manpower, had taken place over the previous ten years and more recently, and the branch was during the time of the research undergoing still more drastic change in this respect. During the past year, for example, the number of "liquid" drivers employed at the branch had been reduced from 25 to 7 in readiness for the transfer of the entire liquid gases distribution operation to Thame. This in its turn affected, as we have noted above, the position of the dispensers, who by the time the research was under way were in little doubt that their jobs would be redundant by the time (usually estimated as September 1985) that the transfer was complete. The repercussions of the transfer echoed through the plant, and in fact during the final week of the research period it was announced that 16 workers amongst the manual workforce as a whole were to be made redundant.

Alongside these far-reaching changes was the ongoing development of computerisation in the ordering and scheduling of delivery of gases, which again during the period of the research resulted in the compulsory redundancy of nine of the (female) gas orders clerks - half of the existing workforce. Indeed I was frequently told during the period of my research at Wembley that the workforce as a whole had been more than halved over the previous ten years as the result of such changes in combination with a general drive towards the reduction of manpower.

The same pressures that had led to this drive also underlay other changes

in work organisation and practices which had, as many managers put it, been forced on the company by the recession. These included work measurement and productivity programmes, themselves originally motivated by the decision to invest "in a big way" in the plant, meaning that management "had to get costs down". The changes which currently affected workers at BOC Wembley can be summarised as follows:

1966 First Work Study Review, ie work measurement exercise, which in the Personnel Manager's words "slashed hours and reduced wages".

1969 WSR 2 - a more complex review taking place over three years which measured productivity in each area to find out for example how long it took to move cylinders - "a long exercise in work measurement".

1971 } Productivity schemes "finally agreed" after the work study  
1972 } reviews enabled the company to "drop a lot of workers".

1973 "Model Plans" drawn up which included relaxation of demarcation lines, increased flexibility, and timings on jobs. Monthly "Productivity Meetings" inaugurated to discuss any problems with these plans and productivity generally.

1979 A "streamlining exercise" or ongoing productivity deal initiated a process whereby "year by year they come in and say they want to get rid of x people, here's the money" (dispenser). While the exercise was officially "just about numbers" it had also led to some changes in working practices (eg the systems of "coverage" and "dead man shifts" which were forms of enforced overtime).

1978 Introduction of palletisation for transportation of cylinders

1979 Integration of separate docks into Central Filling Area

1979-80 Computerisation of cylinder filling process

1984 Announcement of Thame transfer

1985 Introduction of computerisation into driver scheduling

1985 Computerisation of cylinder testing process.

The impact of these changes for the current nature of management/worker relations and the labour process at BOC Wembley can be summed up in terms of a central contradiction between objectives on manning and overtime on the part of both workers and management. This ordained an entrenched set of antagonisms which, while less immediately dramatic and explosive than the "performance" conflict at Landis & Gyr, was as farreaching in its effects. Briefly, the conflicting objectives can be listed as follows:

	MANAGEMENT	WORKFORCE
MANNING	Wants reductions to achieve cost savings	Opposes reductions, but also opposes recruitment and redeployment as this encroaches on their overtime
	Has to increase/enforce to make up for lack of flexibility caused by manning reductions;	Resents levels of but seeks out in order to enhance relatively low basic rate.
OVERTIME	at the same time attempting to reduce in order to control costs. Would prefer to retain rather than increase basic rate	Uses as main bargaining counter but objects to levels of intensification associated with forms of overtime such as "coverage".

The impact of these inherently contradictory objectives on both managerial organisation of and worker response to the labour process at BOC was, as we have indicated, a recurring feature of our findings. The constraints within which both management and workers found themselves along these lines were further intensified by the deteriorating position of the plant itself. Once the centre of operations in the Southern Region, with a degree of worker combativity to match, it was now reduced to something of an outpost, its key operations diverted to an outlying area and itself now by no means immune to total closure. As the Operations and Distributions Manager put it: "About ten years ago, not very

long ago, Wembley was very big, the biggest in the country - to suggest Wembley could close was a joke. Now it would be no problem to close - it's getting that realism across to people."

At the same time, however, whatever its immediate prospects, BOC Wembley remained part of a vast multinational conglomerate facing minimal competition. Indeed BOC's problem was not that of increasing its revenue, which would have brought it into conflict with the Monopolies Commission, but of keeping down its costs. At the same time the company's profits were, to say the least, healthy; the Company Report for 1986, BOC's centenary year, announced "record profits on worldwide turnover of around £2 billion", while pre-tax profits had risen 24% during 1985 and turnover stood at £2261.4m as opposed to the 1984 figure of £2443.0m.

There was, then, no conceivable danger of BOC as a company going out of business. As the glossy pamphlet promoting the BOC Group begins:

The BOC Group contributes to the economies of some 50 countries throughout the world. In each of these economies it manufactures as well as markets one or more of its major product lines: industrial gases, health care, carbon-based and welding products. In all of these products the Group is either world leader or among the world's major producers.

A GMBATU leaflet puts it perhaps less wholeheartedly, after quoting both the year-end profits of £138 million and the £771,600 pa salary of Dick Giordano, Group Chief Executive:

Now that means a successful company in anybody's language - don't it just!

And all the GMB wants is a SHARE IN THE WEALTH.

Sounds fair to us ... pardners!

In this section we have summarised some of the recent changes, regarding both manpower and working practices, which lay behind the productive and industrial relations situation in Wembley. In our next sec-

tion we go on to look at the definitions of, and attitudes towards, this situation by Wembley managers.

#### THE MANAGERS

Despite the apparently unsettling level of employment insecurity and flux existing at the depot, the general atmosphere, among management at least, was one of a calm pragmatism which contrasted noticeably with the nervous aggression of the management at Landis & Gyr. This was undoubtedly due at least in part to the secure profits situation mentioned above. At the same time, nevertheless, considerations of cost and profitability were found again to be more pressing concerns for management than any objective of "control" per se - conceptions of "control", where mentioned, being tied (as at Landis & Gyr) to a specific set of relations between time and money. In Landis & Gyr's case this set centred on the issue of "performance"; for BOC Wembley it was the manning/overtime nexus described above. We now go on to examine the managerial responses obtained at Wembley in the light of this ongoing, and contradictory, relationship between objectives on manning and overtime, beginning with the frequently-used concept of "management of change".

#### "Management of Change"

As stated, this was a phrase frequently employed by managers both at the plant and at regional level to describe their central task and objective. As the Regional Personnel Manager put it, "The role of my department is to effectively manage change and and minimise the damage to people and the company." The Technical Services manager referred to factors such as "too many people, overtime a bit high - this would set off the process of change."

Such references to the "management" and "process" of change as central to the business of management might be thought to refer to the general



activity of planning and implementing an overarching managerial strategy. Indeed, comments were made which referred (in a particularly realistic fashion) to this function of strategic planning:

"...You've got to know 3,4,5 years where you're going. That does tend to change. Equally well I think we are in a depot that's continually changing by forces beyond our control, so technical changes and plans will be modified...you never get there" (Technical Services Manager).

"...Working to a plan almost implies building a castle, and once it's built it's static, but it's a dynamic business, your plan never ends. We'll still go down the same track, but we'll never get there" (Operations/Distribution manager).

This realisation, on the one hand expressing an almost dialectical grasp of the complexities of the process of change, and on the other reflecting a realistic pragmatism, contrasted with the insistence of the Landis & Gyr management on imposing a specific set of objectives whether or not this accorded with existing industrial relations dynamics. This was not because BOC managers were not prepared to unilaterally implement, as we see below, but quite possibly because while the survival of BOC Wembley might be threatened, that of the company as a whole was not in question. However, there was a more immediate and practical reason for management's philosophical acceptance of change as an ongoing process - and this was that "change" and "the management of change" were in fact euphemisms for the restructuring and destaffing of the Southern Region as a whole and BOC Wembley in particular.

That this was the concrete nature of the "change" being "managed" was clear in the managers' analysis of workers' resistance, or as the Technical Services manager put it, "inertia", to change. Not only this manager but management in general appeared to view worker response in this area as a technical problem, comparable to, as the Technical Ser-

vices manager's terms suggests, a problem in engineering. However, since the issue of worker resistance in this area and management's view of this resistance takes us into a distinct and complex sphere, we shall postpone consideration of this to a later section. Meanwhile we examine the underlying rationale of this central programme of change - reductions in manning, reductions in overtime through the elimination of restrictive practices - which, not surprisingly, was presented by management in terms of cost reduction.

#### Management of Change - (i) Cost Reduction

Many managers prefaced their remarks on the need for change with a reference to "the recession". This was seen as a catalyst for already required change rather than a direct cause in itself: "The recession happened and it highlighted and emphasised the problems of low productivity. Management perceived themselves forced to reduce costs" (branch personnel manager). When the specific nature of these recession- and cost-induced changes was gone into, the centrality of the overtime/manning nexus became clear: "With the decline in business in the late '70s, this highlighted overtime and manning. When there was lots of work and consistent growth that didn't matter. The climate of industrial relations was then, at all costs disruption must be avoided to maintain production."

Overtime and manning were, then, targetted by the Personnel Manager as "obvious" candidates for change, with the emphasis on the reduction of overtime as a practical project steps towards which could now be undertaken:

"I don't have a long-term plan - I concentrate on the obvious problems. It's well-known amongst management here what needs to be done to improve things - get control of overtime, manning, understanding of procedures, better communications...The first step is to analyse overtime levels in

relation to actual requirements - set priorities for changing what's necessary."

For the Branch Manager, too, the removal of the "restrictive practices" associated with overtime was seen as a priority:

"We analysed all blockages - I asked the foremen to list to me in their sections what restrictive practices there were - identifying them, rather than doing anything about them, in the first year."

It was clear that such concern about "restrictive practices" was in the main related to the devices used by workers to increase their overtime opportunities and thus their earnings: "The danger is of manufacturing additional pay by taking 9 hours' work and stretching it to 12 - there's an advantage to the individual in doing that" (Technical Services Manager). The Branch Manager also referred to the artificial "stretching" of jobs by workers: "Their performance rate is their activity time - the time taken to complete certain activities. They never reach the time because overtime comes into play before they get there."

In fact, the whole wage bargaining process in the plant revolved around overtime. As the Transport Foreman put it, "They're looking for this extra time - we've got to this situation, it's a ridiculous situation, you'll come up to me and say I want quarter of an hour because I had to wait to get out to East Lane - false overtime, all false overtime...Everyone's looking for overtime, but no one seems to want to work it."

A central aspect of the "change" referred to by management was, then, clearly to reduce this level of artificial overtime with its deleterious effects on costs. But at the same time the conflicting pressure for production continually undermined this objective. As the same foreman put it: "We have to be cost conscious - we get pressure from people above. Overtime - you have to try to keep it down - a very hard

thing to control. So many things go wrong, the only way you can get the job is by paying people" (ie giving overtime).

Yet the company priorities involved in this contradiction were made brutally clear in the same foreman's calculation of the comparative investments involved in lorry and driver. "The company does it on a cost basis - lorries cost £15,000 for cylinder, £130,000 for a liquid tanker - you pay £25 for overtime. It's worth it, but it means the customers aren't getting service."

The relentless cost pressures weighing on management exposed them to a continual, and unwinnable, balancing of priorities within impossibly tight constraints. It was no wonder that managers referred resignedly to the lack of progress in the project of reducing overtime levels.

"I don't think at the moment it has been tackled wholeheartedly - I don't think much has come out of it. I think the management locally - the branch management - they're unsure about where they can reduce overtime without constricting services" (Branch Personnel Manager).

Overtime, then, filled in the cracks left by the manpower reductions, but at a cost to which management could not quite reconcile themselves. The parallel project of reducing manning was, of course, also dictated by cost considerations, but within the overriding set of pressures ordained by "cost" it appeared at times to be a somewhat ad hoc decision as to whether the battle against overtime, or the need to maintain adequate customer service on the basis of a dwindling and overstretched workforce, would be the immediate priority. That the central imperative governing managerial activity was indeed cost was as clear at BCC Wembley as it had been at Landis & Gyr:

"Mid-term aims are influenced by the budget every 12 months - you have to reduce costs by x - that's what influences what you're trying to do with the workforce, influences what you're trying to do. It's the main

factor which influences day-to-day managerial practice...At the end of the day I've always got that feeling which says, How much is it, what's cost and revenue" (Technical Services Manager). And the overall programme for reducing "restrictive practices" was summed up by the Branch Manager in the same terms:

"It was felt necessary to remove the stint practices because they were hampering the effectiveness of the branch - we were not cost effective, we were not competitive...So control meant to manage costs, that's what it meant, manage costs. Managing costs obviously meant people had to work a little bit harder. Harder in the sense that they had to work continuously for longer periods, instead of sweating."

In a few sentences, the Branch Manager had interrelated the issues of cost, "control", imposed by these cost considerations, labour time and labour reorganisation and intensification.

#### Management of Change - "Minimisation of Disruption"

In the foregoing we have attempted to relate the process of change to the meaning management themselves gave to it - the reduction of costs in the accounting terms of budget, cost centres etc, which in their practical realisation took the shape of the programme of reducing overtime and manning. However, there is of course a further dimension in which this process crucially interacted with those who represented the cost to be reduced - the workers. Just as we have tried to show theoretically how valorisation within, and thus the structure of, the labour process depends on a nexus of surplus value/subsistence, or paid and unpaid labour time, so we would present this interaction as the structural basis of labour process organisation and conduct at Wembley.

Nevertheless, the very "conditions" which management set out to regulate as part of their cost reduction process - the workers - were, of course, least susceptible to a systematic programme of improvement.

Management themselves showed a lively awareness of the "blocking" role of workers in the implementation of their objectives:

"The biggest obstacle was worker resistance - technical factors aren't an obstacle - they're practical things that can be done if they're well planned. People changes are harder than machine changes" (Branch Manager). The same manager added later, "Worker organisation is an interface - it's always there" - a comment which, as we go on to see, can be said to sum up the reality of worker resistance within the plant. The Operations/Distribution manager made the same point: "Worker response is very important in getting in the way. Most of our plans are very simple, the only reason we didn't do them yesterday is because industrial relations has dictated that we can't...If there wasn't that problem, you could put a monkey in my job."

We have already discussed some of the ways in which workers, through a process of attrition or in some cases outright resistance in strike action, blocked the managerial objective of reducing overtime - helped, as we have seen, by the fact that management themselves had little alternative on occasion but to have recourse to overtime as a means of overcoming gaps in service left by the reduction in manpower. The Operations/Distributions manager summed up the conflicting dynamics of this situation:

"Changes happen all the time. In the long term the tighter the rules the less the disruption. The disruption arises because people are working at the edge of the rules - up to the limit and with what they can get away with. If the rules are clear cut we can minimise disruption. They're not so clear cut because if they work to rule, nothing gets done. So I rely on the willingness to work together - that works fine if we have the same common aim. I don't believe we often do have."

This manager's use of the notions of "rules" and "disruption" provided

an interesting conceptualisation of the role of workers as the "fly in the ointment" impeding managerial plans. Despite the somewhat philosophical tone of his analysis, "discipline" and "rules" were clearly not abstract desiderata but part of the ongoing and everyday battle between pay and productivity. As an example, the manager said, "The liquid transfer" (the transfer of liquid tanker drivers to Thame) "is classic - they can't control this so why not cause maximum disruption. I want minimum disruption, this is not their aim...their aim is dollars today."

The "rules" which the workers continually broke or challenged were those governing the organisation of labour time and allocation of overtime; the "minimisation of discipline" for which the manager strove was one in which the managerially-structured labour process was carried on with as little interruption and withdrawal of labour as possible. But the breaking of such "rules" was not attributed to any wish by the workforce to usurp the managerial imposition of working norms, but simply to the aim, irreconcilable with that of management, of "dollars today" - acknowledged in the manager's laconic comment that "I don't believe we often do have" (a common aim).

Indeed, in one way there was a clear recognition by both the Operations/Distribution and Branch managers of the very practical reasons behind the workers' intractability:

"I believe I'm conscientious. My aim is a long term solid foundation we can build on. Some highly paid people are looking for pounds today. They see they can't control tomorrow, just today. I don't blame them for making a buck."

"People do try to create opportunities for earning more, which they can only do through overtime. If I was them, I'd do the same thing - I'd be bound to form a similar plan, if I wanted more money out of the system."

In this the managers expressed a curious pragmatism, apparent in the

general atmosphere of relationships at the plant, in which managers and shop stewards appeared to meet on the same territory of hard-nosed materialism. This totally instrumental rationale was acknowledged in the acceptance, or otherwise, by workers of the much-discussed "change":

"When I was trying to increase the carrying capacity of the vehicles, all the stewards were on my side except one, because he was making overtime. All the others were quite happy, because they want the company to be profitable...Divergence from that comes when it affects an individual's pocket...Some of the time we're working together effectively, for example the changes on nights - the blokes are helping us because it doesn't hit their pockets" (Ops/Dist Manager). In general terms the manager recognised that workers "work to live, they don't live to work. Money is their top priority."

In everyday terms, then, the manager recognised that it was economic rather than ideological factors which came into play in the thwarting by workers of managerial plans; where such plans did not "hit their pockets" workers might well join with management in "wanting the company to be profitable". The same almost twin outlook on the part of management and workforce was reflected in the Branch Manager's assessment of workers' attitudes towards him:

"Workers see me as a manager, a person trying to get things done as cheaply as I can - they see their job as trying to get as much out of management as they can."

In this section it has been made clear firstly that Wembley managers, like those at Landis & Gyr, saw their objectives primarily in terms of cost; but that, secondly, the intermittent task of "minimisation of disruption" was seen as necessary in order to achieve these objectives. So far this approach can be summed up not so much as a drive for man-



agerial authority or "control" - indeed, as we shall show, many explicitly rejected such an outlook - as the stance of a somewhat wary combatant aware and to some extent respectful of the opponent's grievances and strength. Managerial priorities clearly remained in the area of cost reduction rather than worker resistance and its repression.

The analytical crunch, however, comes when we probe further into how this essentially undesirable resistance is to be engaged with and overcome, an issue explicitly taken up in the research in an attempt to push the "control" question to its final frontiers in terms of the managerial response to worker resistance. We therefore go on to examine a number of factors: whether the managers' pragmatic and economic acknowledgement of workers' motives allowed them to concede any ground; the tactics used to achieve managerial goals in the face of worker resistance; managerial attitudes to continued resistance; and the possibility of unilateral implementation of, or confrontationist insistence on, managerial goals.

### "Control" and Conflict

#### i) Sympathy but...

As we saw above, managers when questioned were clearly aware of, and to some extent even identified with, their workforce's motivations in manipulating the wage-effort bargain, etc. However, it was clear that such identification in no way led to concessions by managers to the demands themselves. As the Operations/Distributions Manager put it:

"I can understand, sympathise, but that doesn't mean I can agree or can accept - I can see it through their eyes, but that doesn't mean I should continue to accept the poor levels of productivity."

The Regional Personnel Manager, in his turn, confirmed the tenacity of management in the face of developments which might tactically strengthen the workforce. "Some things we've done have strengthened their ability to be difficult - for example centralising at Thame. Also the Central Filling Area, centralising it has made them stronger. But set against

this is the situation that we will manage the situation and not run away."

Despite a tradition, once considerable but now much weakened, of work-group strength and endemic resistance at Wembley, management knew themselves to be the stronger party, particularly in the current economic circumstances. Sooner or later, though worker resistance constituted a tiresome obstacle, they would get their way.

ii) "Modify your aims..."

How, then, was this obstacle, with all its roots in the half-acknowledged need for workers to make a living, approached and dealt with? We saw at Landis & Gyr how a direct clash between managerial objectives and workers' needs and capabilities, never fully confronted by management, led to a "firefighting" syndrome in which unresolved issues erupted unpredictably into conflict. At BOC Wembley also there was something of a tradition of "fires" breaking out in the sense of workers' tendency to walk out in "un-constitutional" strikes, and in fact two such actions took place during the period of the research. At the same time, however, there was the impression of an ongoing and comparatively effective machinery for handling conflict - not so much the official machinery of the procedure agreement, which as the branch personnel manager mourned was frequently ignored, or even the lower-level negotiating structure of the monthly productivity meetings, but a willingness by management to take on and discuss worker response:

"The achievement of change is by persuasion. You sit down and talk to people ...If it's a minor change, usually there's compromise. The only way is to sit down and talk to people, modify your aims within the general goals"

(Technical Services Manager).

"Opposition is bound to be there - how do you minimise it? By being as open as possible about changes that must come" (Ops/Dist Manager). Cunning, too, was important in getting through managerial objectives: "Other techniques? Sneaky things - ask for 100. when you only want 40., so the guys are pleased

that it's only 40%. Change from x to z spread about when it's really x to y..." The same manager concluded that "I use cunning, not brute force, because with brute force you're on thin ice, with cunning you keep talking."

Other managers agreed, ideally, with this softly, softly approach:

"I see management's job as trying to reduce resistance, ease the transition, by involving the employees concerned in appreciation of the reason why changes are necessary" (Branch Personnel Manager). Once again, here there was no concession to the actual needs of the workforce, but a diplomatic commitment to persuasion - worker response was taken seriously, even if its actual content was not integrated into managerial plans.

### iii) Workers and their "Perceptions".

Such managerial attitudes displayed an admirable adherence to textbook ideals of "communication" in dealing with the workforce. However, in the nature of the case it had to be at least partially acknowledged that "communication" in itself was not enough, since conflict continued. From this point of view it was interesting to note the managerial attitude towards worker response, which despite the simultaneous recognition of hard-headed economic motivation, was characterised as "illogical": "Clearly we'd like to, not have a weak workforce, but a more logical one - some arguments are illogical - more realistic I guess" (Ops/Dist manager).

And workers were over-emotional:

"Strikes are emotive, not very well thought out. Workers and management are equally emotive, but management will normally step back and reflect" (Branch Personnel Manager).

The Regional Personnel Manager agreed:

"If you take stoppages, they arise from emotion...There's lack of clarity, emotions, a flashpoint. A buildup, the straw that breaks the camel's back."

In a similar fashion, workers' responses to managerial plans were described in terms of "perceptions" which, it was implied, might easily be as

subjective and unreliable as in the more epistemological meaning of that term. Such "perceptions" were the chief problem facing the branch personnel officer:

"We have significant changes coming through which are perceived as being of disadvantage. For example the new distribution scheduling system requires greater productivity from drivers. The perception will be, we have to work harder for no more pay." Overt worker reaction to such events had long been beleaguered by equally inaccurate "perceptions":

"There's no reason why we can't have high trade union activity and yet still good industrial relations - our formal structure assumes a high level of consultation and negotiation with the unions - what needs to change is the perception that unofficial action is needed to be effective."

#### iv) The Needs of the Business

However unrealistic such "perceptions", the problem was that for one reason or another they existed and led workers to take action which was in many cases, at least temporarily, effective in thwarting managerial plans. So how did management deal with worker response which was in this way immune to "communication" and "compromise"?

While managers were, as we have seen, reluctant to adopt a position of outright confrontation, this was accepted as a normal part of the industrial relations scene:

"It sometimes comes down to confrontation when the talking finishes - difficult to say how often. If it's a serious problem, it usually comes down to some form of confrontation...If you're a long way off target, it leads to confrontation. If you're near, there's not a lot of mileage in losing a couple of days' pay" (Tech Services Manager).

The Regional Personnel Manager was clear in identifying the point at which attempts at negotiation and compromise were no longer possible: "There have been instances when talking has to stop, due to the needs of the business, there's nothing further to discuss. For example the Central Filling Area - we've answered all your questions, we've shown you the figures...we'll im-

plement on Jan 3. If we get no agreement, we'll go ahead if all issues have been exhausted."

However, such unilateral implementation was not carried out in a spirit of wishing to crush or weaken the workforce. Several managers were emphatic that this was not the case. The branch personnel manager was among them in pointing out the dangers of such a strategy:

"Reducing organisation isn't a viable policy, because if you're seen as attacking the stewards or the union, this would strengthen resistance, induce unity, encourage unity of action and mutual support" - clearly the last things the branch personnel manager wished to see.

Other managers echoed, in different ways, this reluctance to take on a head-on collision with the trade union organisation in the plant. For one thing a "weak" organisation was seen as "illogical" and as "leading to arguments among themselves" (Ops/Dist manager) and secondly, any notion of a "power" or "control" struggle between management and workforce was dismissed as without reference in the managers' conceptual vocabulary - indeed, could at best be given a "personal" meaning:

"In terms of a long-term power struggle, I don't know, I wouldn't have thought the guys on site see it in those terms - some of them might have been interested in serious social change, but for most it's much more personal - money's their primary aim" (Tech Services Manager).

"A battle for control? Different stewards treat it in different ways - there are two stewards who want control. You could sum it up as that. These two guys want control for their own personal gain...You get power at different levels - other stewards genuinely represent their members - these others are in a power struggle to help themselves personally - more overtime, protecting their jobs, more perks" (Ops/Dist manager).

But, whatever the strength or weakness of the shop steward organisation in the plant - and it was recognised by many managers that this was seriously weakened by sectionalism - the situation was seen ultimately in the terms

summed up by the branch personnel manager:

"I expect there will be resistance" (to the programme of overtime reduction) "but it will have to be accepted eventually, since in the final analysis they don't control it, so they must accept it."

In the above we attempted to assess managerial attitudes to "control" in terms of the following areas: managerial recognition of worker motivation; managerial response to worker resistance; and how far managers were prepared to push their objectives against continued opposition. In respect of all three of these areas, the findings can perhaps best be summed up by the recognition that neither managerial attitudes nor the tenacity of worker resistance weighed significantly as factors influencing managerial activity against the overriding quantitative goals of cost and production - the "needs of the business".

While, as we have seen, these economic objectives were mediated primarily through the dual programme of reductions in manning and overtime, there were also considerations of "performance" by the workforce which, while less central than at Landis & Gyr, were imposed with an equally relentless disregard for the practical obstacles encountered by the workforce. Some of these are discussed in our next section, which also examines managerial attitudes to the provision of labour in itself.

#### Willingness to Work, and "Performance"

##### 1) "They've got a job to do, and they know it"

It was clear from the comments of both managers and foremen that workers' preparedness to work was not a major problem at Wembley. However, in the nature of the management structure at Wembley, it was foremen and supervisors who were actually concerned with the day-to-day task of seeing that work got done, and it was they who testified to workers' overall co-operation: "There's not a control problem in getting them to do the work itself" (Transport Foreman).

"If they're in the right frame of mind they don't need me to supervise them

...If things are going nicely, no hassles, no friction between men and foreman, you get willingness to work...You get willingness to work - if you hassle them they'll go slow" (Operations Foreman).

Other foremen, and managers, emphasised the necessity of organising the work so that it flowed smoothly, rather than directly coercing workers to do it. The Site Services foreman, for example, said: "Organising work or controlling the workforce - I should say organising. Once you've got your priorities right and got it organised - things run smoothly once you've organised."

For the Branch Manager, such prestructuring of work to ensure a smooth flow was a priority:

"Getting production more efficient? It's all to do with the process of work - having the cylinders ready when you need them. Like palletisation - it was a technical evening-out of the flow of work." The great value of the joint processes of palletisation, integration of the docks and introduction of fork-lift trucks had been, as both he and the Regional Personnel Manager emphasised, the elimination of "peaks and troughs" in the labour process. Pre-integration, workers had often been "forced" to remain idle during slack periods when no cylinders could be brought to them. Now:

"Peaks and troughs have been eliminated...Bringing all the various groups together in a small area means good use of fork-lift trucks. It's more of a flow process than a stop-start" (Regional Personnel Manager).

Structuring the work through these technical and organisational innovations, then, was seen as the effective factor in raising productivity, rather than the harrassment of employees. Intensification of labour, however, for these same employees - again not in terms of "slavedriving" but of a subsistence-related reorganisation of labour time - was undoubtedly an equally important contribution. We examine the contradictions between some aspects of the use of overtime to extract more hours out of the workforce, and the attempt to impose measured "performance" standards, in the next section.

ii) Performance

Clearly the issue of "performance", in the sense that it had loomed at Landis & Gyr, was not paramount in the minds of these managers and foremen in assessing the efficiency of the labour process. While, as we see below, workers subjected to "automatic cover" and other kinds of semi-enforced overtime (described in more detail in our section on Workers) resented the intensification of labour ensuing from the associated practice of "covering", this was far from being the issue, in terms of anxiety about and failure to conform to work measurement targets, that it had been for the Landis & Gyr workers. Conflict at BOC Wembley centred around the allocation of overtime rather than problems directly to do with the intensification of labour.

However, "performance" did crop up as an issue in two respects: one, relatively minor, to do with the length of work breaks, and another, already referred to, in respect of workers' "stretching" of their allocated work times in order to get into the overtime bracket. These will be briefly dealt with in turn.

a) Breaks

Work breaks which went on for longer than had been agreed, rather than "slacking" while actually involved in production, was mentioned by foremen and managers as a common problem in slowing down the pace of work: "We've been pushing up the numbers" (of cylinders tested) "not by making people work harder, just by getting them to change their working practices, for example covering for tea-breaks. We're in a situation where people just take it for granted that they take much longer breaks than they should be..." (Graduate Engineer).

The Works Engineer, however, was of the opinion that changing this pervasive practice was not particularly central to achieving maximum productivity:

"I doubt if you'd get much more at the end of the day if you cut down to the official times. On the operations side we can actually say we are x% efficient, and if during the day we're up to 90% of that, we won't be concerned with 10%.



here or there. At the end of the day, I expect the work to be done and I won't be too concerned if they spend a little more time than they ought."

This seemed to indicate a relaxed approach to an "acceptable" level of effort which perhaps matched the workers' own standards in rejecting extremes of intensification of labour for a "reasonable" provision. The Branch Manager's assessment of worker behaviour was, however, rather more critical:

"They can do it" (match up to measured work targets) "part of the time, but...It's a question of taking breaks. For example they take too long before they start, far too long for breaks, a smoke takes longer than the filling of cylinders." And, he added, "The building up of overtime is a major motivation in that."

b) "Stretching" work

This comment of the Branch Manager's takes us on to the second issue raised in relation to "performance", the articulation by workers of extended labour time with the earnings opportunities afforded by overtime. The Branch Manager was perhaps the most expressive on this:

"Whatever they're given as a day's work, they'll try to extend it to get overtime - a lot of our work is controlling overtime. You could say management is trying to make it cheaper and cheaper, but we have a code of practice, an agreed performance rate - there should not be overtime till they meet the performance rate - they never reach the performance rate but they have high overtime...

"I would like to be able to get the stewards to come on to that platform, get them to agree that people should reach certain performance rates. The stewards say, 'We'll do what we can', but you can measure it, you can get away from, 'We'll do what we can, we'll do our best'...

All we can do is, over the years, get people to understand about the measurement of a day's work, take the mystique out of it. The mystique is created by their mates."

This "mystique" and its peer-group ramifications were presumably created by just that rationale which the manager himself recognised, that "People do try to create opportunities for earning more which they can do only by overtime." Against this "mystique" the manager tried to pit the quantitative certainties of the work measurement scheme, but this was, as he appeared to resignedly recognise, something of a lost cause given the centring of the whole effort/reward nexus at the plant on overtime. With its roots, as we have seen, in the drastic reduction of manning, this domination of the organisation of work by overtime considerations had spread even more damagingly to the delivery area, where a long-term shortage of cylinder drivers aggravated the already appalling delivery record (calculated at 50% by the works engineer), and the introduction of computerised scheduling for these and other drivers had simultaneously slashed their earnings and further affected the quality of service by undermining drivers' personal knowledge of routes and passenger requirements.

In an interesting reversal of the notion of "mystification" with which we characterised the attitudes to performance standards at Landis & Gyr, management at Wembley attributed workers' transgressions over the standards to an irrational "mystique" to which was contrasted the scientific calculations of work measurement. Again, then, as at Landis & Gyr, measured targets of production linked to the level of economic viability of the branch were used as central axes with which to structure and assess the labour process. The important difference that, at Wembley, such standards were cut across in a contradictory fashion by the pressure from both management and workforce for overtime, did nothing to reduce the validity for management of time-measured production norms as key criteria for judging the effectiveness of the labour process; as was clearly demonstrated in the example of the lorry drivers (see below, Workers, section 1) whose problems in achieving scheduled delivery times were witnessed on several occasions by management yet treated as of little account against the work study depart-

ment's calculations. It was these production targets, then, and their interrelation with the various strands of economic pressure affecting the branch (summed up in the need to reduce costs while maintaining "customer service") which structured the dynamic of management/worker relations, rather than any central concern by management to exercise domination over the workforce.

### "Authority" and "Responsibility"

We have seen in the preceding section that any aspects of management/worker relations which might plausibly be comprehended under a rubric of "control" were in reality shaped by and subordinated to much more directly economic constraints. Most managers, indeed, as it were subliminally accepted this in directing their remarks along an axis of cost and economic viability rather than one of domination and subordination. One manager, however, who more explicitly took on management/worker relations from a perspective of managerial "authority" and worker resistance, or non-cooperation, was the Branch Manager. We shall therefore consider his remarks in some detail before passing to our concluding section.

The views of the Branch Manager were perhaps the most definitive in articulating the shifting relationships between managerial objectives and worker response in the plant, between the rationale for "control" and the corresponding obstacles generated by the workforce. This manager delivered a strong negative to the notion that he might wish to "show the workers who's boss here" and was adamant that any "long term policy of establishing managerial authority" was "totally unnecessary". At the same time, in an earlier interview, he had argued that "the assertion of managerial authority" was needed "if you're always split down the middle, on two sides."

In other words, the need for authority stemmed from conflict, rather than causing it - an argument with which we are familiar through, for example, the writings of Stephen Hill (1981) discussed in Chapter 2, but which goes

one step further than the assumption, criticised in Chapters 1 and 2, that worker resistance is a response to managerial repression. On the other hand, what are the "two sides" about? They can hardly be, as we argued in Chapter 2, a direct response to interests explicitly recognised around the relationship of exploitation and production of surplus value, since such a recognition would imply an articulate awareness of capitalist production relations. For the Branch Manager, the dividing line was defined in terms of "responsibility" and "running a business":

"Certainly trade union rules and regulations are such that they don't necessarily agree with running a business. Why?...trade unions live in the past, you could say managements live in the past, but they can't live too far in the past, they have to deal with the future - trade unions don't have to deal with the future, or targets, or getting stuff to customers."

In this analysis of the reactive role of trade unions and its implications for the division of labour under capitalism, the Branch Manager's remarks echoed those of Michael Edwardes, in Back From The Brink (1963) when he castigated the BL shop stewards for their "irresponsible" attitude: "It is management who have responsibility for the business; if the power is to move to the shop stewards, let them have responsibility for the business, let them find the banks to lend the money, let them persuade governments of any colour to tide them over bad times, let them persuade competitors to collaborate; and let the unions persuade customers to buy the products they design, build and deliver."

The Branch Manager was realistic about his workforce's refusal to take "responsibility", despite the fact that his goals were defined very much in these terms:

"I believe that workers ought to be accountable for everything they do. I would like to see less supervision and the workforce made accountable. I don't think that's possible, so what we have is a workforce that don't accept responsibility - absolute responsibility for everything they do -

they accept a certain amount of responsibility, they accept that they've got to come in here, do a certain amount of work. In the ideal situation they'd check the query for the customer, etc."

The need for "control", then, was a pragmatic response to the needs of production, which were fulfilled only in part by the workforce. "Each person should be responsible for their own job - that makes management very easy. If they're not prepared to accept responsibility you need control. Control generally means management control, more supervision, they're more tightly supervised. All I want is results - I'm going for results - how do I get there? There's a number of alternatives, and one of those is people taking responsibility."

And, later, "You use the system of managerial authority to get work done, that's what the system is about."

Nevertheless, there remained this invisible, if well-defined line beyond which workers were not prepared to go in order to "get work done". As we have seen, this was not a question of not being prepared to "come in here and do a certain amount of work" but of actually exercising an overview of the production process, its aims, rationale and co-ordination, which became by default the sphere of managerial "control".

When it came to the question of why workers were not prepared to go beyond this point (which, ironically, many labour process writers have seen as "contested terrain" between workers and management from precisely the opposite point of view) the explanation was unequivocally economic. "Why aren't they prepared to take on responsibility? They don't get paid for it, they're governed by different rules. The rules of the union as such, of union groups, somehow come down to restricting what you have to do in the course of a day."

The "somehow", however, the rationale of what these rules "came down to" emerged as clearly related to the workers' struggle for subsistence:

"They will say to me, look how much the company makes...they feel they

have more opportunities to make more - 'It's a big company, they can afford it'. I've said to the stewards, 'You've got this situation, you can choose - either money related to profit, or money related to trade union negotiation! If it's the first, then they must be paid in relation to any drop in profit, if it's the second, they get the best deal, a market deal. There's a market, they will go in and say we want the minimum...'."

The implication of the manager's argument here is that workers' commitment is to a "negotiation" or "market" perspective - in other words, bargaining for the best deal within a given range of subsistence. Thus while he appeared to see no theoretical reason why workers should not be able to take on a "managing" function in the sense of co-ordinating and taking responsibility for production - "There's nothing magic in management, getting jobs done. If you've got two people and a business, they're both managing and they're both working" - at the same time the Branch Manager was forced to recognise that, primarily due to their "negotiating" stance, workers were not in fact prepared to take on such functions. The two approaches were in fact incompatible; speaking of the restrictive trade union "rules", the manager concluded, "...they can't manage. One or the other, you can't do both."

"Control", then, was necessary in the absence of workers' willingness (rather than capacity) to take on managerial functions. The need for "results", the meeting of "targets", "getting work done" necessitated a control structure which would be irrelevant if workers were prepared to extend their relationship to work beyond a "bargaining" approach. But they were not, and this in its turn made further conflict inevitable. To return to the Branch Manager's original point: "The assertion of management authority is needed if you're split down the middle, on two sides." The "two sides" could only have their origins in workers' struggle for subsistence and lack of interest in other aspects of the labour process.

#### Managers and Control: Summing-Up

The presentation of our findings on management has attempted principally to

follow through the dynamic of managerial objectives in relation to worker resistance; how such resistance is looked on, in terms of its underlying rationale, and what lengths managers are prepared to take to deal with it.

Clearly the projection of a more or less definite set of managerial objectives, and the intended or actual implementation of such objectives in the face of worker resistance, can be presented in terms of a drive for managerial "control". However, there was little of such an abstract political perspective in the managers' attitude to achieving their tasks, or to tackling worker response within this process. The tasks themselves, despite the somewhat grandiose description "management of change" given by many of those interviewed, emerged as the specific and unequivocally economic goals of reducing overtime and manning. Nor were they seen as part of a consistent overall strategy, least of all one aiming at achieving managerial "control" and in fact not even related to the more modest goals of technical and organisational change. Rather the situation was acknowledged as being too dynamic and unpredictable to allow for any such long-term planning.

Specific managerial objectives, however, were real enough (despite being, as we pointed out, internally contradictory) and managers had no hesitation in implementing them when the occasion demanded. Such single-mindedness, however, was linked to "the needs of the business" rather than to any wish to assert managerial authority as such - this notion, in fact, being vigorously denied on more than one occasion. Indeed the managers seemed to display a kind of pragmatic empathy with the needs of the workforce, an everyday recognition of worker rationality, undermined only when workers' continued recalcitrance led to the mystified characterisation of workers' behaviour as "illogical".

In this context there does seem to emerge a picture of workers and management at Wembley as almost "partners" linked in a kind of complicity of the cash nexus. Lest this should conjure up a picture of two roughly equal combatants in an ongoing "class struggle" (cf the discussion of Friedman,

1978, in Chapter 2), such an impression should swiftly be removed by reminding ourselves of the far more formidable power of the managers, particularly in Wembley's current situation, to "unilaterally implement". As the branch personnel manager had put it, "In the final analysis they don't control it, so they must accept it." In this context worker resistance remained in the nature of a war of attrition, a continual irritant and obstacle to managerial objectives, but in no way, as the managers themselves recognised, an overt or aggressive "power struggle".

Managers at Wembley, then, had overall "control" over what went on, mitigated more by the conflicting economic constraints within which they were forced to work than by any sustained level of worker resistance. Such "control" was, however, a fact of life ordained, first of all, by the company's economic supremacy and necessitated, secondly, by the workers' indifference to managerial functions and commitment to struggling for their own subsistence. It was not a deliberate political goal of domination and suppression of the workforce; nor was it in itself made necessary by any disturbing level of worker resistance over either the provision of labour or any other issues fundamental to management/worker relations as such. Rather, the achievement of managerial objectives at Wembley appeared to be undermined more seriously by the inconsistencies and contradictions we have described between conflicting sets of these objectives than by any sustained problems with worker response. At the same time, the whole issue of overtime was crucially tied in with workers' subsistence and thus their central response to the labour process; and it is to this and the other major features of worker experience at Wembley that we now turn.

#### THE WORKERS

As is clear from the managerial information, workers at BOC Wembley had for some years now suffered a systematic erosion of their staffing levels which had, along with other changes, led to a structured intensification of labour through "coverage", "dead man shifts" and similar practices



involving enforced overtime. It was this development which now centrally influenced the experience of and response to the labour process for workers at the Wembley branch. We shall therefore begin by looking in more detail at the dimensions of this overtime/manning nexus, while other related issues, such as worker knowledge and willingness to work, will be examined in due course.

i) Overtime and Manning - the realities

Since these conditions affected particular groups of the workforce in different ways, we shall look at the impact on the various groups - Central Filling Area and associated workers, site services workers, dispensers, and drivers - in turn.

Central Filling Area a) Overtime

Workers in the Central Filling Area, cylinder test shop, and compressing shed, as well as the forklift truck drivers serving these areas, shared the same "Model Plan" agreement, dating from 1973, which gave them five hours' guaranteed overtime in addition to the basic 38-hour week. As well as this, all workers in these areas were expected to be available for "coverage", the system whereby workers could be called out from home in the (typical) event of having too few workers to cover a shift. Alternatively, as in the compressing area, specific agreements might require the already small number of workers to provide regular extra hours in order to make up for a permanent shortfall in the workforce. Both these kinds of enforced overtime, though particularly the first, varied throughout the year, becoming particularly prevalent in the summer.

Workers had, as might be expected, a mixture of feelings towards this system, which brought them extra earnings but also considerably restricted their lives outside work, even leaving aside the question of the intensification of labour (discussed further below) which this interlinking of longer hours and manning reductions brought about.

"The 7am to 6pm shift, you get overtime but for the amount of overtime you're expected to do an awful lot. Between us we're only working 6 hours of the 9 hours that man does, so we have to cram in an extra 3 hours. It's a way of earning a few extra pounds, but at the same time it's too much" (Joe and Ken, compressors).

"This early shift's nearly as bad as the late shift used to be...Now you can't get out at night. They never consider that, they expect you to be behind the door waiting for the phone to ring" (Jim and Alf, filler operators).

Thus, while the extra money provided by overtime was seen as welcome, even indispensable, there was some resentment over the fact that these enhanced earnings had to be gained by such a demanding means. Most workers emphasised how essential the extra earnings were to their income:

"You have to do overtime to get a living, without overtime the wages is useless" (Ed, filler/sorter).

"We don't feel we're being treated right. We're living on overtime...It makes the difference between living well and just managing" (Jim and Alf, filler operators).

In this context it should be remembered that BOC, not surprisingly given its multinational status and impressive profit figures, was notorious as a "high payer" in the area; indeed, some workers who had been employed for the relatively short period of 4-5 years still could not quite believe their luck. At the same time, as the worker just quoted pointed out, "It would be wiser for people to remember that actually the basic rate is lower than they think it is, because of guaranteed overtime."

#### b) Manning reductions and intensification of labour

As we have indicated, the existence of overtime with its increased earnings opportunities was integrally linked to the drastic decreases in manning which had taken place over the previous decade or so. The outcome of these

combined factors was that while during the same period the work had become physically much easier, there was a marked increase in the pace and intensity of labour. The introduction of palletisation and fork lift truck conveying of cylinders, which had roughly coincided with the integration of the three old docks into the Central Filling Area, had transformed the nature of the work process from a strenuous lifting of heavy metal "bottles" (cylinders) on to the backs of lorries to a comparatively immobile process of monitoring and checking. The workers appreciated the easing off in physical hardship:

"It was just like carthorses over there, the work, everything was double work. The job has changed insofar as where you had to roll the bottles off the lorries and reload them, now it's been palletised. The main change is for the better. It's easier in that sense - not as much walking involved" (Harry, filler/loader).

Asked whether these changes had meant a general improvement, the same worker commented that "You're filling more cylinders now than you was, only one man filling on each gas, it used to be two, so in that respect you're filling more gas than what you did before per man. You're working harder filling." The distinction between intense physical effort and increased intensification of labour was recognised by many workers, with resentment focussed on the reduction in manning and the corresponding increase in effort (as well as the imbalance in the relationship between effort and reward, to be discussed more fully below):

"It's got faster, they haven't as much hand on the bottles as they used to have - with the new system, filling bottles is faster. We're working harder now than we used to, there's fewer men doing a little more work" (Michael C, fork lift truck driver).

"We're doing way more work now, a lot of men have gone. There used to be three shifts, more rest time. Then they took off the night shift, we had to

catch up on that...We're doing the work of two men, getting more work, opening up new shops, getting rid of the old way of delivering...The work side is getting harder all the time" (Tim, filler/sorter).

Site Services Workers a) Overtime

At the time of the research this group of workers, who maintained the site and filled in on the operating side when required, were particularly affected by the overtime position in that their regular weekend overtime, which had been available to them for some seven years, had abruptly been withdrawn. Not surprisingly they were somewhat disgruntled by this move, which had taken place without use of the normal procedures, and had staged a three-day stoppage, ended when management agreed to talks. The withdrawal of the regular overtime, and its substitution with occasional weekends for only one or two workers, had meant a considerable drop in income for these employees, who were not subject to the "coverage" opportunities offered to the central filling workers.

The workers were particularly aggrieved by the fact that they had not been offered any compensation for their lost earnings, a previous "custom and practice" right:

"We feel very bad at the moment, the weekends had to come to a close sometime, but other departments have been compensated, they're trying to back out in relation to us - what's fair for one is fair for another."

The loss of overtime undoubtedly meant a considerable drop in income:

"We'll miss it, make no mistake...if the basic rate was higher, you could have a decent living wage - with the Tory government everything's going up. All that's bugging us is money - we lose £70 a week take home pay - we used to clear £183 a week, working a 46 hour week it'll be £115" (the site services workers already had 8 hours a week contractual overtime).

As mentioned earlier, the overtime had been withdrawn without going through the agreed procedures (management's justification being that there was no

contractual obligation) and the workers' response had focussed around this violation of status quo:

"When they told us they weren't going to give overtime, no way we'd take it sitting down, it's a hell of a loss. We went and said there was a dispute, we asked for the status quo to be restored, the foreman said the status quo is the model plan...the lads came to me" (Bill D, the steward) "and asked me to go upstairs, ask for status quo - they told me that status quo is the model plan, I said it's as you were. We gave them three hours' warning, we played them right to the book" (talking about the three-day walkout).

These workers, then, backs against the wall of the seemingly inevitable erosion of staffing and hours in the branch, were stubbornly pursuing their case for the restoration of previous income in terms of the "real" meaning of status quo - the retention of existing custom and practice ("as you were") until all procedures had been exhausted. Any effect their original walkout might have had was dissipated by the deference of both steward and members for formal procedures and by, as emerged later, an almost total lack of practical support from the convenor. Other workers at the branch, also, were reluctant to support the site services workers, who they saw as greedy and as having failed to provide them with support in the past. As the dispute wended its slow way through procedure, the prospects for the restoration of the site services workers' formerly "privileged" position appeared increasingly bleak.

#### Dispensers a) Overtime and work time

As mentioned in our introduction, the dispensers had at the time of the research been placed in an increasingly uncertain position due to the ending of rail deliveries of liquid gas to the Wembley branch. This situation, itself brought about by the "liquid transfer" to Thame, would remain unresolved until the transfer itself had been finally dealt with, ostensibly that Sep-

tember (ie within six months).

Meanwhile, the pattern of work for the dispensers had slowed down almost to a standstill, with the additional irony that they were all on large amounts of overtime. This was again due to the institutionalised manning shortage. The established number of dispensers was six, but one of these posts remained permanently unfilled; the other was occupied by the convenor, and was therefore in practice usually unstaffed. The convenor's absence, the "dead man shift" (as covering for the unfilled post was called) and the technological necessity to keep the dispensing function staffed around the clock, meant that it was common for the dispensers to work extremely long, often 12-hour shifts.

Dispensers described the pattern of work and its changes since the announcement of the transfer to Thame:

"There's a steady rundown of lorries coming in, private customers are slowing down as well...There's no changes on overtime, there's five of us up here, one who's convenor, he's hardly ever here, we've got to cover his job. The train's stopped now. There's nothing to do. In the last eight months, there's been less and less work...Before this, we had a hell of a lot. In the last two years the liquid we had going out nearly doubled...There's been a changeover from intense work to nothing" (Paul M.)

"When I first came in, there was plenty of work, wagons all over the place. It's different now, I feel I'm wasting my time...Everyone here feels the same way - we've just lost interest - the place itself has really gone downhill - it's on a knife edge - alright, they've installed a new building" (the Central Filling Area) "but they could just pick up the machinery and go - nothing's permanent, I thought I was here for life but not now" (Paul and Martin).

While the earnings afforded by the continued high levels of overtime were appreciated, at the same time there was resentment at the encroachment into workers' lives:

"I don't want weekends" (overtime). "If I'm doing overtime, I'd like to fit it into my life, not fit my life round overtime" (Paul M).

"I don't think we should have to work overtime to get a decent wage - I don't think we should have to work a 40-hour week to. I'm getting ripped off by BOC" (Alan).

As was clear from this statement, this worker was more explicitly politically aware than most at Wembley. Earlier he had commented that "workers are always being told the business is being squeezed, maybe that's true on cylinders, but on bulk liquid management's making money hand over fist, but all we're getting is job losses, cutbacks and clawbacks on pay - I don't like working overtime, but the reality is blokes on this site don't work overtime because they agree with it, but because it's the only way to make a decent wage...You're economically forced to do more work to get overtime."

This last comment summed up in a particularly useful way the crucial interactions between workers' subsistence requirements and the managerial organisation of labour time, particularly in view of the simultaneous intensification and extension of labour that was the specific feature of the organisation of the labour process at Wembley. As Alan pointed out, work was "forced" out of workers, not by any coercive activity on the part of management, but through the pressure of workers' own need to make a living. Nor, in a variation from Landis & Gyr, was such "work" necessarily always of a directly or intensely productive kind, but might consist of protracted hours of relatively passive monitoring ordained simply by the technical requirements of the product.

#### b) Planning and Uncertainty

The most salient factor in the dispensers' work lives at this point was, of course, that all "six" of their jobs were in question in the context of the impending transfer to Thame and the associated ending of rail deliveries. While the workers knew what was happening, no one had spoken formally to them about the situation:

"It's nearly finished, we don't know if we're coming or going...We keep getting told no compulsory redundancies, whatever vacancies arise will be filled by us or someone else, vehicle maintenance for example...It affects them as well. That's where the problem is - there might not be any jobs..." (Paul :).).

A lot of workers made the point that, as Alan put it, "Now the old men are gone." In other words, management had reached, as it were, the bone in cutting down on the workforce; there were no more men who would willingly go. As Alan pointed out, this threat of compulsory redundancy followed what was for many workers an experience of being herded round the site with "constant fear of job loss" - "For example the two Pauls will be redeployed - this is the second time in two years - they become like industrial gypsies. For the Thame drivers this will only last five years, then they'll be transferred to Southampton."

Workers' attitude to this continual insecurity was one of mingled resentment and resignation:

"There's no point in taking action, the work's gone anyway. Look at it all, it's cost. It makes sense to move to the Southern Region, that's where the work is...The men on the floor know what's going on and what should be done. But what's coming down from the top has to happen. For example the transfer to Thame is going ahead even though we know it won't work" (Paul and Martin).

The workers accepted, then, with a resentful fatalism, that there was little they could do about the disappearance of their jobs. At the same time there was something of a dislocation between this acceptance of the inevitable and the workers' opinions about what ought to be done, both in terms of the future of the plant and region (the workers just quoted were not alone in thinking that the transfer might not work, others casting doubt on whether Thame could actually cope with Wembley's work as well as its own) and also with regard to the union's failure to fight. The ultimate sense of powerlessness by workers was due not only to the overwhelming weight of BUC's



strength as a multinational, quite crushing enough in itself, but also to the general lack of effective trade union organisation on the site, which in its turn was rooted in the sectionalist defensiveness of other workers in jealously guarding their overtime. These problems will be looked at in more detail later. Meanwhile, there appeared to be little the dispensers could do but apathetically carry on with the semblance of what had once been purposeful jobs.

Drivers a) Overtime and scheduling

Overtime for the drivers was largely a question of estimated journey times, which in the past had often been loose enough to give them a comfortable margin of earnings. Now, however, a general tightening-up of times, paving the way for the computerised scheduling of deliveries due in August, threatened this practice:

"If they've got a job in Ipswich, for example, the notional time is 13 hours - this is what they're paid however long it takes, often it's shorter...Nationally, overtime is now being attacked. No driver actually does more than 9 hours, but they were getting 14 hours - it's a pay cut of between £40 and £60" (Alan, dispensers).

While this might appear a classic example of the institutionalised "fiddle", what it had actually resulted in was simply a comfortable living wage for the drivers, which would not have been attainable on basic pay. Alan, in fact, saw computerisation itself primarily in terms of a pay cut:

"Computer times - well, the issue is notional because it's the pay packet really and management's interest is in cutting their pay packet...Management is more interested in cutting pay than increasing jobs" (ie intensifying labour) "though that will come, especially with Thame."

Whether or not the sole or even the major purpose of introducing computerisation was to cut pay, this was certainly one of its effects. The computerised scheduling of gas deliveries, usually referred to as BLS or Branch Distribution Schedule, had two aspects: the direct linkage of the customer's gas

supplies with the branch, so that the computer could "inform" the branch if supplies were getting low; and the computerised calculation of delivery routes, speeds and times. It was on this second score that the drivers' pay and conditions would suffer the worst, with their overtime opportunities being threatened in two ways; the increase in estimated miles per hour, and the tightening of the time specified for the actual delivery. The first would also automatically increase the number of "drops" a cylinder driver (one making shorter local trips) would be expected to make.

This increased pressure on drivers was part of an overall tendency which had taken place over some years, culminating in what were seen as the unrealistic times calculated by the computer:

"...you're given three minutes to unload, turn around, but you can't question it because 'it's in the computer'. BDS is meaningless because traffic conditions change all the time" (Alan).

"The times are too tight. The traffic's increasing, management's trying to get the times down. Times tighter still, how tight can you get it? Drive like a maniac?" (George T).

The "meaninglessness" of attempting to measure and tighten delivery times in any systematic and accountable fashion had indeed been empirically demonstrated more than once to the Operations/Distribution manager when he had accompanied cylinder drivers out on their rounds:

"I've never been able to understand it. He knows the problems, he went out with several fellows so he knows it's not a wind-up or nothing like that. We was doing it by the book, we do it our way - we can do more, but he wants us to do more than that...We had a union meeting one night, he conceded a certain amount of calls was too much, we came in the next morning and it was exactly the same, we'd wasted our time" (George T).

Management, then, in a manner reminiscent of the "performance" calculations at Landis & Gyr, were determined to adhere to a quantitative calculation of what times were, presumably under ideal conditions, attainable, rather than

accepting a more realistic, and actually observed, qualitative assessment of the actual work pattern. Given this experience of the managerial response, the advent of computerised times was seen as baffling, if not impossible:

"I don't think there'll be enough time to do the job anyway. If it's going to be as tight as they say it is, we'd better do something before we all get the sack for not being able to do the work" (George T).

In this impending situation there was, then, an increasing conviction among the drivers that, like the workers at Landis & Gyr, they simply would not be able to adhere to new managerial norms of production. The distinction between "willingness to work" and resistance to, or incapability of, maximalised intensification of labour was here defined once more.

#### b) Manning

There was no doubt that the drivers had suffered by far the largest recent reduction in their numbers. The transfer to Thame alone had slashed the number of liquid drivers from 25 to 7 within a very short period, while the number of cylinder drivers had also dropped drastically, over a longer timescale, from 68 to 22.

While the reduction in liquid drivers followed logically from the transfer to Thame, the insistence on cutting down on numbers of cylinder "ferry" drivers, backed up by the continuous pressure for increases in productivity, clearly cut across any attempt to improve on the decidedly poor (50%) delivery record. Attempts to tackle this seemed to be directed towards the computerised methods of increasing productivity and assessing customer demand referred to above, rather than raising any remote likelihood of increasing the number of drivers.

Indeed, the current policy seemed to be having rather the reverse effect, as the branch was having difficulty filling the four posts for cylinder drivers that were currently vacant and suspended until the completion of the transfer to Thame. Even the threatened dispensers were not interested in

these jobs, which carried a reputation for thankless slavedriving. The level of speedup was now such that there was a high turnover even among the current workforce; as one of them, George T, summed it up, the existing norm of 25 calls a day was already, even before the advent of computerisation, "a heart-attack job".

ii) Responses and Reactions - the workforce as a whole

The dominance of overtime in all these workers' lives in two senses - firstly in its structuring of the labour process and secondly as a vehicle for increasing their subsistence - held them to some extent trapped in a form of collusion with management. As we indicated in our introduction, both management and the workforce simultaneously sought and rejected overtime, for different reasons: on the workers' part the wish and need to enhance earnings in contradistinction to the resented intensification and extension of labour; on management's the drive to cut down on labour costs as against the need to cover for the inflexibilities that this caused.

The pursuit of, and attempt to control, overtime and job security on the one hand, staffing and cost reductions on the other, was then at the centre of conflict between workforce and management at Wembley. Before looking more closely at the dimensions of workplace organisation in the branch in relation to this question, we shall explore two further areas which have been assumed in the literature to provide focal points of worker resistance; worker knowledge/creativity, and willingness to work. We shall also look at what has been argued in the thesis to be a more salient basis for such resistance, workers' response to the relationship between effort and reward.

a) Worker Knowledge: "You work in there, you're all idiots"

There was no doubt that workers were aware of, and cynical about, management's lack of respect for their abilities. At the same time their own intimate knowledge of the production process delineated for them the areas where management was nowhere near getting it right:

"We could definitely run this ourselves, more efficiently with fewer losses,

more safely...For example, get rid of this system" (the computer console)  
" - they're making losses because they're pumping the stuff through so fast it's heating up and they're losing more" (Alan, dispensers).

"If we had a say in the running of things, we could run it better than that. We have no say in the choice of vehicles, they're sometimes unsuitable, they put the installations, the tanks, in silly positions, everyone's there except the driver" (Pete W, liquid driver).

At the same time, it was accepted that management had no interest in anything the managers might want to say:

"The guv'ners don't like to be told anything, we had a suggestion box, but management doesn't like to think that workers are doing their work" (Eugene, filler).

"With modern management, they don't really listen to what you've got to say - they do things their way, upstairs somewhere, they don't like to be proved wrong" (Ken and Joe, compressors).

"More say? You don't get a lot. It's always been the same, 'Because you work in there, you're all idiots'. Even though you do the job day in day out" (Jim and Alf, filler operators).

However, while workers clearly recognised that they knew more about the job than management and that management had high-handedly cut off this area of knowledge from their own operations, such illogicalities were viewed passively, rather than being a focus of active resentment. So far were workers from feeling any commitment to "creativity" in their work (the opportunity for which was, in any case, hardly overwhelming) that while recognising their role as a "tool of the machine" they positively welcomed this:

"It's much easier than when you had to fill them" (the cylinders) "before - everything's done in the consoles" (ie computerised). "I suppose it is a bad thing because you are the slave of the machine...It doesn't affect me that much...It's much easier with the machine" (John, filler operator).

"The machine really in some respects is controlling you, rather than

the other way round...Before you could work out for yourself how you did the work. Do I miss it? Not at all - it was old-fashioned" (Richard, test shop).

Among the drivers, however, there was some frustration over how the taking over of their own organisation of the job by computerisation influenced their relationship with the customer: "Our knowledge of the job is just wasted, gone by the board now...It's altered all the work pattern - it used to be compact, now it's spread out all over the place...I don't bother really, we just do our day's work and that's it. In the old days if you'd done the round and had a bit of liquid left, you'd drop it off" (Pete W, liquid driver).

At the same time, any active attempt to alter the situation was seen as going beyond the workers' brief. As the VCH driver put it:

"The planning of the drops doesn't make sense - two wagons can end up going to the same place on the same day - we know, because we do the job, but management - if you suggested anything management would think you was a right creep - 'Who the hell is this little upstart?' - you start getting out of your own sphere and, you know, 'What do you know about it?'"

b) Willingness to Work: "Your job comes up to you day after day"

Just as the above comments were reminiscent of those of Landis & Gyr workers in their awareness of, but reconciliation to, managerial attitudes, so the Wembley workers shared a similar "pragmatic acceptance" with regard to the obligation to work. We have already seen from the comments of both supervision and management that "chasing" the workforce was not a major necessity or preoccupation (up to the point of "responsibility" defined by the Branch Manager) and this was reflected in workers' remarks:

"Supervision? We run it ourselves. We're a law unto ourselves up here, unless they send different lorries. We do the supervision ourselves, we know what's to be done" (Paul M, disps).

There was a general recognition that it made very little sense for workers to do anything else but work:

"I enjoy it because if I don't someone else will. Someone's got to fill it so I might as well fill it in good faith" (Winston, Central Filling Area).

Referring to the filling of jobs rather than cylinders, this comment could be seen as an eloquent statement of the interchangeable and commodity status of labour. As the same worker had said earlier, "no one feels anything great about work, you're here for your wages, you do what you have to do for your wages." His workmate expressed (independently) a similar point: "Like it's for a day's wages and that's it - you have to work someplace and that's it. When you can't have what you like then you must like what you have" (Eugene, CFA).

Most workers expressed a similar feeling that the situation was so basic as to be unquestionable:

"The job is alright...it's a job, isn't it. If the kitchen is too hot, you get out" (Monahan, test shop).

"There's no good points about work. I just try to ignore it and just get on with the job and do it and that's all there is to it" (Harry, filler/loader).

"Your job comes up to you like day after say, you just keep going like and do it" (Michael and Michael H, fork lift truck drivers).

One worker, it was true, took this basic acceptance of work a little further: "I work right up to my time. I believe that when you're at work the governor has bought your time, it don't belong to you, it belongs to him, so if you take time off you're stealing" (Monahan, filler).

While, as we shall see, there was considerable awareness of and rejection of profit as a counter to their own level of reward among the workforce, this was not related by any of them to the provision of labour, with the exception of Alan from dispensers. As he put it:

"If I didn't feel that the purpose of my work is to make some other bugger rich, I'd put a lot more effort in. In general, that's shown by for example with the hospitals" (to which BOC supplied oxygen) " - people will put themselves out because they feel that the NHS is part of them. In the Falklands war, the blokes who supported it worked very hard...I don't think private profit can get work out of workers - we come to work to make a living."

Here Alan was expressing a crucial distinction which in his experience registered in the response of the rest of the workforce, while not necessarily being explicitly recognised by them - that between the provision of, and attitude towards, the use of their labour power as a commodity, and any positive creative involvement in the work itself. The same distinction to which the Branch Manager had drawn attention to in his argument about "responsibility", it in a sense reverses the conception (within the labour process debate) of workers as striving for more "autonomy", more "discretion" over the organisation of their work. But this resistance was not due to any overt "hostile will" (Friedman, 1977) on the workers' part to the provision of their labour as such; rather the line is drawn simply by the definition of work in terms of "making a living" - of the sale of labour power as a bargain which involves just as much labour as is required to "do your job" - "and that's it".

We now go on to look at issues which have been argued within the thesis to be more central to workers' response to the labour process than these more qualitative questions; the relationships between effort, reward and, where relevant, profit.

c) Profits and Wages: "We get the crumbs"

Although employees did not explicitly link their provision of no more - and no less - than what was required by the "bargain" of employment, to the profit motive itself, several of their comments showed that they were sharply aware of, and bitter about, the disparity between their own pos-



ition as workers whose pay could only be raised above the average by large amounts of overtime, and that of BOC as a vast multinational conglomerate with a very healthy turnover. This disparity had a particularly clear expression in the gargantuan salary of BOC's Group Chief Executive, Dick Giordano, whose pay at the time of the research had just risen 48% to £771,600 a year. As Paul M from the dispensers put it:

"It's a sore point with Giordano - there was an £80m profit rise for the first six months of this year - his salary rises accordingly - they could afford to pay the workers a rise." In fact the "union side" of the national negotiating committee had now agreed on a claim of 25% on the basic rate, with additional benefits, to be put forward at the annual negotiations the following month, but few among the workforce hoped for anything more than six or seven per cent.

Giordano tended to be the figure on whom workers pinned their resentment at not getting a "fair share", particularly since he himself was remembered for having announced, perhaps rashly, some years before that he thought workers ought to get more benefit from company profits:

"Pay - it's not a lot, compared with some jobs outside it's good, but when you look at the profits it's not a lot. Giordano's the man who said workers should be getting more, there's no sign of it here" (Joe and Ken, compressors).

There was a general sense, then, that while the advantages of working for a company as large and stable as BOC were potentially considerable, they somehow were not finding their way to the workers:

"Working for BOC - bigger profit, so you should get bigger wages, but it's not always like that - too many shareholders. With the transfer to Thame drivers are leaving and not being replaced - the company's saving money, economising, making profits - it's good luck if we get a bit" (Pete W, liquid driver).

"Pay? When you look at the profits they're making, you can't say it's

fair - we get the crumbs" (Harry, filler/loader).

This disparity between the unusually high company profits evinced in these workers' employment, and their own comparatively humble level of subsistence, was further underlined by a more common resentment at the widening gap between effort and reward:

"There's unfair treatment in respect of money - more and more, we're not on bonus, they keep adding and adding, we're producing quite a lot and there's half the staff - a third...They cut their running costs, they're getting more work done with less men - lovely for them, that's business ain't it" (Jim and Alf, filler operators).

"Management's got greedy nowadays - they want more and more out of you for less and less - more production for no more money, more deliveries in the same amount of time...You have a tendency to feel we're doing the actual work, they're getting the benefits. It doesn't affect the actual work, but your attitude - you do the job and that's it" (Pete W).

Yet, however unsatisfactory, it was money and money alone that was marked out as the central motivation both for working at all and also for any involvement in outright resistance:

"I only come to work for money so I can do the best for my family - the standard of living is going to go down...If it comes down to rock bottom, might have to get another job as well" (George T, VCH driver).

"That's what we're here for - we're all here to work for money. We'll come out for money" (Jim & Alf, filler operators).

### iii) So What Can You Do About It? Worker Organisation and Resistance at BOC Wembley

#### a) No more Numbers - the Erosion of Employment

The Wembley branch of BOC differed from the Landis & Gyr factory in having had a long-term reputation, damaged only recently, for impressive workplace strength and organisation. As the convenor put it: "We're in a weak position in recent years compared to what it used to be. We used to

dictate more or less what we wanted. It's the high levels of unemployment."

Not only unemployment as such, but also the change in the position of the Wembley branch itself from the strategic centre of operations in the Southern Region to what was potentially, with the transfer to Thame, little more than a depot, was behind this development. The comparatively strong position of both the branch and the union organisation within it had been clear as recently as 1977, when Wembley drivers had played a leading part in the successful national four-week lorry drivers' dispute.

This apparent organisational tenacity was, however, something of a temporary halt in what was in fact a long term process of decline in employment and thus of basic workplace strength, which the convenor dated from 1964. Somewhat belatedly, the convenor now announced himself determined to stem this flow, while at the same time demonstrating his awareness of the inevitable advance of "progress":

"A lot of people have been made redundant - but they were all about 60, quite happy to go - but now we're getting to the stage where the workforce is getting younger. We'll oppose on principle, it will be opposed from now on...Obviously you can't oppose progress, say Thame, you can't insist on maintaining jobs when they've just disappeared. But later we will have to have a policy of maintaining jobs because we will have a younger workforce with no intention of leaving. We haven't adopted a Luddite stance - there's no option but to change. BOC had to compete in the market, but we had no problem because so many people wanted to leave - we didn't try to stop them...In future we will fight it job by job - the blokes work quite a lot of overtime - it's difficult to say to people We'll take people out of the dole queue, you drop your overtime. It might be alright to have high-flying theories about the 25-hour week and so on, people just think of themselves and that's understandable."

In these comments the convenor expressed a number of conflicting pressures

and realities about the situation facing the BOC workforce. The almost casual response by stewards and the workforce to the largescale redundancies which had taken place in the plant was, it is true, based on the accurate assessment that, as older workers, these were personally quite happy to leave behind a lifetime of grinding toil at BOC and receive what were by all accounts substantial payoffs. At the same time the fact remained that the redundancies had not been fought, and this, as well as effectively allowing the ultimate rundown of the branch, had put the convenor and stewards into a position where they were going to have to summon up resistance from a very low base. There was no reason why the convenor should have much credibility in the matter of fighting redundancies or indeed in taking a very strong stand over any issue against management, an image which was reinforced by some of the weaknesses in his own past behaviour and the union organisation in the plant generally, to be looked at in more detail below.

Thus, while it was indeed by now urgently necessary to fight redundancies "job by job" given that whatever slack there had been in the workforce was decidedly used up, the likelihood of effective action seemed low, and was further lowered by the two other factors the convenor had mentioned; the workers' strong adherence to overtime, already discussed above, and the structural "necessities" that dictated events such as the transfer to Thame.

There was, of course, no objective reason why the workers should have had to sacrifice their overtime, or at least the earnings accruing from it, in order to get fellow-workers off the dole, but there was a strong acceptance amongst many of even the "guilty" workers that it was their greed in working overtime that was creating unemployment. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the convenor was unable to provide, or even consider looking for, any strategy that could go beyond the sacrifice of one or other group of workers.

On the restructuring of the company, specifically the transfer of liquid

gas distribution to Thame, while it was true that, as Paul M from dispensers had said, "it made sense" to centralise operations there given the existing production and distribution of liquid gases at Thame (not to mention the cheaper rates prevailing there) at the same time the remorselessness of the decision, with its trail of redundancies (a further 16 being announced towards the end of the research period) expressed only too forcibly the way in which these workers, trapped by the movements of a vast conglomerate like BOC, seemed in a very real sense powerless to influence their fate. It was as though at BOC Wembley the traditional workplace organisational tactics which had worked for the past twenty or thirty years were now entering their final phase, while at Landis & Gyr new groups of workers were taking up and trying out these tactics. The struggle at Landis & Gyr was in some ways just beginning; at Wembley it appeared to be ending. However, the picture was not in all ways pessimistic.

#### b) New Stewards and Old Tricks - Weaknesses in Workplace Organisation

One of the major problems facing current workplace organisation at the branch was that the waves of redundancy had carried off with them not only the "old men" in general but also the old, in other words experienced, shop stewards (see Terry 1984 for a reference to this development in industry generally). The convenor himself had only held office for the last two or three years, and was generally regarded as inferior to his predecessor; so much so that a steward from another branch had recently been elected as Chair of the Southern Region shop stewards' committee, a position traditionally held by the convenor at Wembley. The most recent example of the convenor's shortcomings had been the dispute among the site services workers, in which the convenor had been absent from the site at the crucial time and had failed to use his influence to persuade management to maintain status quo or grant the site services workers compensation for their lost earnings.

The new and less experienced stewards were in general, according to Alan

and other workers from dispensers, an easy prey for managerial wiles which involved buying the stewards drinks after meetings and otherwise exposing them to the full force of managerial ideology:

"The lack of a full-time convenor, for example, is company policy... Other management ways of undermining shop steward organisation - like after meetings they'd all go off to the pub - not necessarily doing deals, but workers think there'll be deals, so cynicism grows. Also they try to build up company loyalty, especially with the stewards, they take them off to a country house, show them the charts and so on - even among the most militant stewards you get the argument that there are exceptions, you have to protect customer x" (Alan).

Such managerial "tricks", however, could be effective largely because there was no longer any very significant grassroots organisation on site, or indeed much left of the combine structure which at one time had backed up shop stewards in the company as a whole:

"In 1977, when we had that strike, we had a combine throughout the company, but that was broken up by the national officials. In 1980-1, there was a threat to the Corby site..the combine was going to meet but the national officials stopped it - the combine hasn't met since"(Alan).

This lack of a strong outside organisation was reflected in the branch in a falling-off of the once important trade union branch and site meetings which had taken place at Wembley. This erosion of grassroots participation in union affairs was blamed by Alan for management's increased ability to spread rumours and split the workforce:

"You can't call site meetings - we're always reacting to management, we don't have a policy. We're not really weak here, but we're not well organised...Management deliberately start whispering campaigns, for example site services - there's not a lot of difference between groups but management deliberately spreads the myth that some groups get more - they isolated the site services workers, they obscured the real issue - when

overtime has gone, the group has always been compensated for one year - they broke this, broke procedure - they did the same to the fitters the week before" (Alan).

The "union" on site was also seen as having been responsible for the condoning and spread of overtime, with its consequences for destaffing and redundancy:

/Why so much overtime?/"Because of the union, I think...At the moment they do encourage overtime. Management isn't worried, it means they don't have to employ someone else. The union should be doing it the other way round, getting more people working...All overtime on the site should have been stopped until everyone's sorted out their jobs" (Paul M, dispensers).

But the fact was that on a day-to-day basis the stewards were both forced into, and accepted, their "other" role of defending their own and their members' standards of living by maintaining and where possible increasing levels of overtime. It was this contrary pressure which was behind one of the most serious sectional weaknesses on the site, the jealous guarding by specific groups of workers of their opportunities for overtime.

#### c) Workplace Sectionalism at Wembley

As Paul M went on to say:

"Dominic"(the fork lift truck driver shop steward) "said you ain't coming down here and stopping our overtime."

The plight of the dispensers, six vacancies in search of a post elsewhere on the site, neatly illustrated the conflicting sets of worker interests which coalesced round the issue of overtime. Rather than welcoming the extra manpower brought by the dispensers as representing a lightening of their load, workgroups in the Central Filling Area adopted a "dog-in-the-manger"-ish attitude to any possible slackening in the tight staffing provisions which might threaten their opportunities for "coverage". This attitude, in fact, had been responsible for the workers' original reluctance

to leave the old docks and accept integration into the Central Filling Area.

Mick, the CFA shop steward, summed up some of these responses:

"When you've got a group of men you've got little benefits, so when they want to change you lose all them, start from scratch." (What sort of benefits?) "You don't want to lose overtime, things like that...I don't reckon on any change benefits workers - it might be easier, but there's less money in your pocket. Having an easier job doesn't pay the bills." On the issue of the dispensers, he went on: "The Central Filling Area doesn't want more, because of overtime and coverage. The dispensers went out of the Central Filling Area, there were jobs vacant here and they wouldn't take them, now they want to come back - we went out of the gate to get what we've got" (referring to the three-week strike in the filling area 18 months before). "We've done all our negotiating, we don't want more."

A common aspect of workplace sectionalism, as we saw at Landis & Gyr, is to blame another group of workers for some aspect of support that has not been forthcoming in the past. In fact the dispensers had had little choice but to "go out" of the Central Filling Area in the general restructuring of the workforce that was taking place at this time. But the stewards in the area showed little sympathy for, indeed displayed positive hostility towards, the dispensers in their current plight.

Another factor which exacerbated sectionalism in the plant was the institutionalised racism which had existed for as long as anyone could remember. Put at its bluntest, Irish workers worked in the Central Filling Area, English workers were drivers, and West Indian workers were found in the vehicle maintenance area. Although this latter grouping presumably did not date back to the founding of the plant, the prevalence of Irishmen in Central Filling certainly went back to the time when this work was predominantly the "humping" around of heavy metal bottles. As the convenor put it: "At one time the vast majority of people were Irish, because the



work was so hard...people came from building sites on to here."

The racial divisions existing in the workforce did not so much display themselves in open hostility as underline the perceived conflicts of interest between different groups of workers in the plant. In particular, perhaps, the cultural traditions of English and Irish workers were very different, the drivers seeing themselves as somewhat cunning operators while the filling workers were to some extent still regarded as brainless labourers.

In contrast to this, however, it was difficult not to sometimes take an optimistic view of the effects of working together on different cultures, when witnessing the frequent uproarious outbreaks of teasing and laughter which would take place in the canteen between the black garage workers and the female Irish canteen assistants.

d) Still Some Spirit Left - Continued Resistance at Wembley

On the "optimistic" side also (depending on one's point of view) was the fact that, while workplace organisation at Wembley was by no means the force that it had been, overt resistance was still common amongst workers in the sense that spontaneous walkouts were a far more common feature of management/worker interaction than they had been, for example, at Landis & Gyr. While both Alan and the convenor mourned the passing of the solid strike at Wembley, both gave examples of very recent stoppages:

(Alan) "When you had a strike before, you just walked off, no picket, no asking for support - now you need site meetings. The last one - three drivers wanted to take voluntary redundancy, went for other jobs, then were told they couldn't have their redundancy money. So the other groups stopped."

(Convenor) "It's more of a reaction than an action situation now - you could get the site to react at the drop of a hat - you could get strikes, it was a doddle, but not now. The issues? Mostly over wages. Just now we're in that situation again. You dissipate your energy. We had a small

strike on Friday - the site services management said they couldn't work weekend any more. If this escalates, we could have a two-week strike, then we'd dissipate our energies for any longer strike over pay."

It was as if, despite the weakness and non-participatory nature of workplace organisation, and the powerful forces which workers were up against, they continued to react in the same way that had served them for so many years. An instance of resistance which would have been a major event at Landis & Gyr was an almost casual, everyday occurrence at Wembley. Currently, such sporadic resistance gave no hint of the development of any positive long-term strategy for the workers at the plant, and indeed seemed rather to reinforce their powerlessness in its sectional nature, but at the same time there were rank-and-file murmurings, in their own way rooted in the militant traditions in the past, which seemed to indicate the possibility of a more effective involvement by workers in the struggles which lay ahead.

#### CONCLUSIONS

In looking at the responses of the workforce at both Wembley and Landis & Gyr our main concern has been whether or not they bear out our central theoretical hypothesis about the economistic nature both of resistance and consent by workers, and the centrality of exploitation in workers' experience of the labour process. As at Landis & Gyr, the responses of workers at Wembley can be taken as largely supporting this hypothesis. Far from seeking increased control over their work, these workers actively, or perhaps it should be said passively, resisted such additional discretion, seeing their work centrally in terms of making a living.

As we have seen, the main driving force behind worker response and resistance at Wembley was the issue of overtime, which both provided a shoring-up of basic subsistence and also vitiated any effective struggle to hold on to jobs. It was only now that this struggle was becoming

urgent, and the dejected faces of the site services workers on hearing the announcement of sixteen more redundancies spoke only too clearly of the realisation that struggle might now be too late.

The workers' exclusive concern with immediate "economistic" issues, in other words with their standards of living, had indeed led them into something of an impasse in which sectionalism and the lack of any long-term strategy would now allow management, as one of the central filling workers put it, to "pick us off one by one". But what had got them into this position was precisely the direct and short-term economism which in itself has gone largely unrecognised in the literature. Although there was some adherence to managerial ideology among the workforce and their representatives, it was not this which had weakened them but the daily struggle to keep up an acceptable standard of living against what were by now overwhelming odds - odds not of a drive for managerial domination for its own sake but of the harsh realities of the restructuring of a multinational conglomerate.

In our theoretical critique of the labour process debate "control" thesis, we sought to distinguish the separate strands which entered into the assumption that "control" is what workers seek at work. These fell into three main areas: resistance to the translation of labour power into labour, the centrality of worker creativity, and resistance to managerial domination, which is again seen as aimed at control per se.

On any of these criteria, the workers both of BOC and of Landis & Gyr fail to conform to the "control" thesis. In both cases, the workers displayed a stoical "willingness to work" which was structured by the understanding of the provision of their labour as part of a bargain so fundamental to their existence as sellers of labour power that its overall rationale went unquestioned. True, as the Branch Manager pointed out, his employees failed to take total responsibility for the outcome of their jobs; but this refusal was not based on any explicit resistance to the surrendering

of labour to an expropriating employer, but simply on the assessment that any surveillance of work beyond a certain point was not what they were paid for.

On worker knowledge, workers were indeed cynically aware both that they knew more about the job than management and also that management was not interested in their knowledge, indeed jealously guarded their own "expertise". But this recognition was not accompanied by any intense resentment, nor was it at any time a catalyst for overt resistance against management. Rather, such realities were accepted with a casual resignation, an air of "What else can you expect". Although workers were well aware that in some areas "we run this place", any desire to take it over was far from being on the agenda.

Finally, as we saw in discussions with management, even among the most combative of shop stewards and the workgroups constituting most of an irritant to management, what was at issue was not any struggle for "power" or "control" but simply what the managers defined as "personal gain" ie, on the whole, money. When drivers insisted on extra overtime for being kept waiting by the garage, what they were looking for was overtime, not a chance to score against management or the foreman. As we saw, the Wembley workforce's former fortress-like position was based more on the strategic significance of the branch for the region, and the overall levels of profitability involved in transporting gas, than on any coherent plan for overwhelming management with worker power. The lack of any such plan was, of course, partly responsible for the position the Wembley workers now found themselves in. But it remains important to recognise that workers acted in the past, and still act, because of immediate economic pressures and not as part of any political struggle for "control".

What we appear to be left with, then, is a bleak and fruitless economism. But it is economism, and it is important to recognise it for what it is. Once we do so, it may be possible to acknowledge and pick out the polit-

ical implications and potential of such existing responses by workers, as was attempted in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis. But while labour process writers continue to assume that workers are interested in things they are not in fact interested in, the struggles of workers like those at Landis & Gyr and BOC Wembley will remain unrecognised, or at least misunderstood.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusions

The arguments within this thesis have fallen into three main groups: a critique of existing labour process theory, particularly the concept of "control"; the establishment of an alternative analysis of the specifically capitalist labour process, centred on the relation of exploitation; and a theory of resistance and consciousness within the labour process in which these economic categories are emphasised.

Theoretical Arguments

In this concluding chapter we shall review the arguments in turn, continuing with an attempt to summarise them in terms of the central theoretical constructs contained within the thesis. We shall then assess the contribution of the empirical data presented within the thesis to the theoretical hypotheses. Finally, we attempt to look to the future in terms of both the "objective" and "subjective" developments within the labour process which have been examined in the thesis as a whole.

(i) Critique of the Critiques

In our introductory chapter we saw that the "labour process debate" of the last decade or so has consisted mostly of criticisms of Braverman (1974). Braverman is lauded for having placed the concept of "the labour process" back on the agenda of explorations of work, and in this sense it is implicit that a Marxist approach to the study of work is seen as both welcome and innovative. At the same time, however, fundamental criticisms of Braverman's approach are made which, we have argued in our own critique of these post-Braverman arguments, in their content and implications appear to cancel out much of the "Marxism" to which their authors profess to ascribe.

In itself the simultaneous embracing of and criticism of Marx is, of course, no crime; in fact it can be said to have been the lifeblood of the development of Marxism and all other forms of critical social theory. In this case, however, what we have argued throughout the thesis to be a crucial "absence" in current labour process theory is the failure, whether deliberate or otherwise, to apply major, particularly economic, categories of Marxist theory to the analysis of the structure and management of work at the point of production.

An important and in many ways valid reason for this, as acknowledged in Chapter One, is the postwar reaction amongst Marxists against "economic determinism", itself a response both to Stalinism and the rejection of revolutionary ideas by a comparatively affluent Western working class, which has coalesced in the movement known as "Western Marxism". A critique of many of the ideas represented by this movement, which are seen as leading away from the identification of central contradictions of capitalist class relations, is offered in Chapters One and Five. For our purposes, the importance of these ideas is that they are argued to have centrally influenced current theories of the labour process and thus to have had a parallel influence within this area in concentrating analysis almost exclusively on the superstructural - political and ideological - aspects of capitalist production relations.

This concern with the superstructural is echoed, we have argued, within critiques of Braverman by a corresponding emphasis on the subjective in the analysis of worker response which is shown in many of its expressions to echo the concerns of an earlier "industrial sociology". The continued emphasis on the subjective experience of work (reminiscent of such themes as "job satisfaction", "worker motivation" and the Blaunerite version of "alienation"), the reproach of Braverman for

paying insufficient heed to the character of social relationships at work, and the unquestioned prioritisation of the qualitative content of work, all echo themes common within traditional industrial sociology.

Most of the major themes within the labour process debate so far can, then, we have argued, be related to one or other of these theoretical currents. The pervasive focussing within the debate on issues of domination and subordination in management-worker relations, for example, reflects the general concern within Western Marxism with superstructural issues, while analyses of worker response in terms of hegemonic consensus (such as those of Burawoy (1979, 1985) and Lazonick (1983) are a more sophisticated extension of the same theoretical perspective. The equally widely-shared assumption that what is primarily at stake within the labour process are issues related to the qualitative content of work and workers' response to such issues raises the question of precisely in what respect the debate has gone beyond industrial sociology, particularly given the concern of some recent writers with constructing typologies of work, and the increasing trend towards contingency theory.

The issues which the contemporary labour process debate has raised, around both of these two theoretical axes, are neither unimportant nor irrelevant. What is lacking - and this thesis has been an attempt to redress that lack - is any clear attempt to locate such issues within the framework of the system within which they are in fact located - that is, the capitalist mode of production. Such a location would require a further exploration of the impacts of that mode of production on the labour process itself; and this, with our discussion of, for example, the intensification and abstraction of labour on one hand, and the centring of worker response on a reward-effort axis, we have attempted to do. The overwhelming emphasis within labour process theory so far, however, has been on a content-related view of work



which effectively disregards the economic context, in terms of the overriding pressure for valorisation, within which that work takes place. As such it has been criticised as expressing a profoundly ahistorical view of the labour process which is perhaps most clearly represented in the use of the term "control".

The theme of "control", as we saw (Chapter 2), while widely used by labour process theorists, has been defined and specified by very few of them (though Cressey and MacInnes and Storey, for example, see the need for such a definition). At the same time, the concept appears to represent a crucial aspect, the nervecentre almost, of post-Braverman perspectives on the labour process. In our second chapter we set out to chart the dimensions of this concept as used by a range of labour process writers. Its use was broken down into three major areas: the translation of labour power into labour, the nature of social relationships within the labour process, and the creativity of labour.

Each of these groups of arguments, while in their own terms inaccurate, we have maintained, in reflecting the real nature of managerial strategy and worker response, more importantly raise fundamental questions as to our perspectives on and interpretation of the capitalist labour process. Ultimately all three strands of the "control" approach reflect a concretely production- oriented view of the labour process (production of use- rather than exchange-value) which ignores the historical context in which that production takes place.

The view that labour has to be coerced out of labour-power once purchased, for example, suggests first of all that the use-value of labour-power continues to reside with the worker, in terms of the worker's freedom to create useful objects (as in a "natural" labour process in which labour simply interacts with the means of production, which are its objects). Within capitalism, however, the

use-value of labour-power is the creation of surplus value - that is what labour is for. As such, labour takes place within a structure shaped by the objective of valorisation in which, as Marx indicates particularly with his concept of the real subordination of labour, the relationship between the labourer and the means of production is crucially reversed so that the labourer becomes the instrument of the means of production rather than the other way round.

In everyday terms this means, as we have argued throughout the thesis, that most workers have little choice but to work up to certain levels of intensification of labour. What is more, as we have also argued throughout, worker resistance is concentrated not at the point of transition from labour power to labour but precisely at the point at which such levels of intensification are contested. In other words, resistance is not to the alienation of labour, but to its intensification beyond the contested point; a point itself defined partly in terms of what it is possible for workers to do and partly by what they regard as involved in the sale of their labour power as a commodity.

This second point, the status of labour power as a commodity, has increasingly been questioned by recent writers as part of the overall prioritisation of ideological and political factors in the analysis of the labour process. As we argue in Chapters 2 and 3, the sale of labour power as a commodity is in fact central to the whole relationship, itself the "foundation" of the capitalist mode of production, of the creation of surplus value; and it is the role of subsistence (the price of labour power) in relation to defining this surplus that workers implicitly recognise in their conception of "working for a living".

Relationships which have been viewed by labour process writers in the wake of Braverman as revolving primarily round the exercise of domination and subordination in the creation of use-values can thus be seen from an entirely different perspective once the priority of exchange-value creation under capitalism is brought into the picture. Relations of domination and subordination (as well as the creation of use-values) exist, after all, in any class society, and this is one reason why we have called the post-Braverman perspective on the labour process "ahistorical".

Another reason is encapsulated in the emphasis of writers such as for example Cressey and MacInnes, whose work is discussed at length in Chapter 2, on the creative potential of labour. This intrinsic creativity is said to pose a central contradiction (one cited also by Storey and assented to by Littler and Salaman) between capitalist patterns of "efficiency" such as hierarchies and differentiation of function, and the creative initiatives which are both possible and in fact essential for workers to contribute to the labour process.

Within this argument "efficiency" in the organisation of work and production has been identified with "control" in the repressive political sense, a relation which is held solely to emerge from the overall political relations of domination and subordination which characterise capitalism. As we have argued in Chapter 2, this makes the forms of "control" cited by Cressey and MacInnes inexplicable in their own right, apart from as instruments for the repression of the workforce per se.

In contrast, within this thesis we have tried to draw attention to a specifically capitalist meaning of "efficiency" in which aspects of the organisation and intensification of labour like detailed task differentiation may arguably be "illogical" in principle but make perfect

sense in relation to the economic objectives of capitalism. Here, despite the contribution which qualitative worker knowledge could and should make to the organisation of production, the emphasis is on speed, output, interchangeability, standardisation. Work is atomised and abstract rather than rich in complex, integrated and variable content; the criteria of efficient production under capitalism are quantitative, not qualitative.

In putting this argument we have reversed David Gordon's dictum, also discussed in Chapter 2, that efficiency under capitalism is assessed in the qualitative terms of how effectively production processes themselves reproduce capitalist relations of production. In contrast we have tried to emphasise the overwhelming pressures emanating from within capitalist relations of production themselves in ordaining the measurement, timing, intensification and abstraction of labour which together make up the dimensions of what these writers have called "control".

What we have criticised as the ahistoricism of an approach which focusses on aspects of production relations not specific to capitalism also raises a more fundamental point about the role of contradiction. Briefly, while this point will be discussed in more detail below, it can be said that the concern with the productive, qualitative content of work reflects a location of contradiction outside those contradictions which are internal to capitalism. In other words, rather than systematic contradictions, contradictions between systems (that of capitalist, identified in a primarily political sense, and some system involving a "natural" labour process which avoids the political constraints of capitalism) are being looked at. And this in its turn avoids any central examination of how the contradiction internal to capitalism in fact undermine and surface within that system. This point will, as we have said, be explored in

more detail after we have reviewed the arguments within this thesis on the nature of internal economic contradictions within capitalism and their expression in forms of worker response to the labour process.

(ii) Valorisation and Exploitation

In our second set of arguments we have sought, in contrast to the predominance of "control" arguments within the labour process debate, to advance a theory of the specifically capitalist labour process. As we have argued above, theories of "control" have tended to leave aside the question of how the impact of economic processes such as valorisation affects the labour process; and indeed any structural analysis, insofar as it is recognised, is criticised for ignoring the complexities of social relationships within the labour process. Littler and Salaman, for example, criticise Braverman from the point of view that "Throughout Braverman's analysis there runs a highly mechanistic, deterministic strain whereby relationships, once established as necessary, are regarded as satisfactorily understood and explained. Braverman is not interested...in questions of how these theoretically required relationships are actually organised and structured in practice" (Littler and Salaman, 1982, 251). Later in the same paper these authors specifically disallow any notion of the capitalist labour process.

But what we are interested in, and have tried to tackle in this thesis, is the question of how these "theoretically required relationships" actually influence and condition how relationships at work are "organised and structured in practice". An essential task thus becomes the reversal of the relationship in which capitalist relations of production are seen as important, insofar as they are specified at all, primarily as constituting a framework of political pressures of domination and subordination, to one in which the intrinsic workings

of capitalism as a system of production are seen as central to that system's foundation, its labour process.

It is for this reason that in our third chapter we turned to the exposition of some central principles of Marxist economics, a source which, as we pointed out, has been markedly neglected in most recent writings on the labour process. Were it simply for the purpose of textual exegesis this exercise would be, quite literally, academic. However, the analysis of the capitalist labour process contained not only in Chapter 7 of Capital but also in the more recently-translated Resultate ("discovered" in the year of the publication of Labour and Monopoly Capital) presents crucial insights which at the very least should not be ignored by those who have aligned themselves with the term "labour process".

Chief among these is the location of valorisation, expansion of value, as the overriding objective of the capitalist mode of production, and the impact of this objective in terms of a reversal of the relationship between the means of production and the labourer. We have already referred to this reversal in discussing the relationship between labour and labour power; its significance, or at least the significance of its recognition, lies in a changed perspective in which the dimensions of the labour process can be seen as structured by the drive for valorisation rather than being continually "recreated", as it were, in an ongoing process of reworking the relationship between "man" and "nature" anew. The structures of capitalism - particularly in their physical form under the real subordination of labour - can be seen as providing an existing context into which all the shifting and changing relations of technology, work organisation, and management-worker relations must fit, or in terms of which they are defined.

We have already pointed out that this crucial shift in perspective is one on which our whole thesis is premised. In Chapter 3 we set out first of all to provide a more detailed account of the economic theory on valorisation involved in this argument, and then went on to explore its implications in terms of a twofold analysis centred on the key relationship of exploitation; the analysis emphasised on the one hand the dimensions of the labour process associated with the extraction of surplus value, and on the other those related to the determination and contestation of subsistence. A central argument of the thesis was that these two aspects frequently meet and are integrated at the heart of the labour process in the effort/reward nexus.

The issue of the impact of the valorisation objective on managerial organisation of the labour process, then, was taken up in terms of the phase of real subordination of labour on which capitalism enters when its methods of production become adequate to the requirements of this central objective; in other words, when the development of machinery, etc., enables capitalists to extract relative rather than absolute surplus value from the workforce. This issue is itself approached in terms of the overriding need of capitalists to reduce socially necessary labour time in order to compete. The reduction of the time necessary to produce a given commodity and the corresponding ability to extract a relatively greater amount of surplus value from workers within the same amount of time generates an intensification of labour which we saw as a central feature of workers' experience of the capitalist labour process - again, one in which in these terms appears to have been neglected by current labour process theorists.

In contrast, we have attempted to show how this intensification under the real subordination of labour has achieved still more concentrated expression in the techniques of scientific management, of which Marx at the time of writing his Resultate and developing the concept of real subordination of labour (which itself, as we argued, has been widely misinterpreted by labour process theorists in terms of political relations of domination and subordination) could not have been aware.

Scientific management, too, with its dissection, atomisation and timed measurement of work patterns, could be seen to give rise to an increasing realisation within production itself of the principle of abstract labour which Marx saw as characterising commodity production. Some support for this arguably "idealist" position was obtained from writers such as Kay, Braverman and Gleicher, and Paul Willis in his important book Learning to Labour adds an interesting footnote:

"We saw...that, to all intents and purposes, 'the lads' do not basically differentiate between particular concrete types of work which they regard as being open to them...There is near indifference to the particular work finally chosen so long as it falls within certain limits defined, not technically, but socially and culturally...I want to suggest here that this perspective...can be understood in the light of a real penetration of the role of labour in the modern structure of capitalist production...The inner logic of capitalism is that all concrete forms of labour are standardised in that they all contain the potential for the exploitation of abstract labour" (Willis, 1978, 133). This leads on to a discussion of the abstraction of labour within production itself in which Willis notes that "The whole thrust of modern techniques of organisation and methods such as time and motion study is, in one important sense, to narrow the gap between concrete and abstract labour" (136). Further strands of



Willis' argument as to the non-differentiation of labour are discussed in Chapter 4.

The location of this "real" abstraction of labour at the heart of the manufacturing labour process is a key proposition within our thesis. In making the point we are attempting to show that "Taylorist" principles of work organisation, rather than representing primarily attempts to repress the workforce, are in fact an expression of the ongoing logic of capitalist development and thus truly, as Braverman puts it, "the explicit verbalisation of the capitalist mode of production" (Braverman, 1974, 86). This point is made also in Chapter 1.

What this means in terms of the daily experience of the labour process for the workforce is that forms of the technical development and organisation of production structure their work in such a way that its form, geared towards the maximisation of surplus value, becomes more important than its content. It is as though work takes place within a skeletal construct of interchangeable and tightly measured prototypes each themselves reconstituted from the atomised elements of labour charted in work measurement. The impact of such abstraction and quantification of labour, itself shaped by the incessant drive for valorisation on the part of capitalist management, is that for workers too the meaning of their work lies in its quantification in terms of the linked variables of effort and reward.

In looking at the ways in which the overall objective of valorisation structures the managerial organisation of the labour process, then, we have emphasised as key aspects the intensification and abstraction of labour and attempted to bring out the relation of both of these to the development of scientific management. The nature of the experience of such abstraction and intensification for the workforce

is examined more closely in Chapter 4, which is a survey of published empirical accounts of work. Here the issue of the levels of intensification of work at which workers resist is charted more specifically in terms of the managerial objectives of machine-like application, consistency and predictability on the part of the workforce. In concluding our argument on exploitation as the central relationship in the capitalist labour process, however, we went on to look at its subsistence-related aspects.

This section began with a defence of the labour theory of value on the grounds of the unique capacity of labour to produce surplus, and went on to show how this surplus is essentially subsistence-related - determined in terms of the relation of paid to unpaid labour time. As such, we argued, subsistence is continually contested within capitalism, and the forms this contestation takes range from the cheapening of labour power through deskilling (though this is not deskilling's primary purpose) to direct attempts to reduce the value of labour power which commonly, we argued, take place within the labour process itself.

In putting the point of view that subsistence issues are materialised within the labour process as such, our argument (as we acknowledge) goes somewhat beyond Marx, who makes clear that the determination of subsistence belongs to the sphere of circulation and the market. It seems to us, however, to be an essential aspect of relations within the capitalist labour process that issues of effort and reward are daily fought out as part of the very structure of work. Not only, as we argued, is subsistence used as an "incentive" by management in order to extract more effort out of the workforce, but also, as we saw in Chapter 4, issues of timed labour and worker reward are frequently interlocked in such a way that the whole measurement and organisation

of work is linked to a given level of subsistence. When the output of the workers in the factories studied by Pollert and Westwood fell below a certain level, the "ratchet" of their pay slipped, too, to an inferior grade. In addition we saw clearly in our own case studies how "performance", in the first example, and the overtime/manning nexus, in the second, linked in with subsistence in the organisation of the labour process. Given that, firstly, the determination of subsistence is thus structured into the organisation of the labour process in these and many other instances, and secondly that workers themselves echo management in seeing their work in quantitative and value-oriented terms, it follows that these tendencies, which are an expression of the dimensions of capitalist relations of production, themselves reflect the contradictions inherent in those relations. And indeed the corollary of our argument on exploitation is that worker response and resistance centre on the emergence of the central contradiction between subsistence and surplus value, paid and unpaid labour, at the heart of the labour process itself. Our next set of arguments deals with the relations between this contradiction, or group of contradictions, and the nature of working-class consciousness and struggle.

### iii) Acquiescence and Resistance in the Capitalist Labour Process

We have deliberately included the theme of "acquiescence" in introducing this final set of arguments, because in considering the nature of worker response to the labour process the question of what workers do not resist is seen as equally important with what they do. This is partly, as with previous arguments, in order to repudiate what seem to us some mistaken assumptions about the nature and content of worker resistance, but also in fact to focus the discussion on the very question of what worker resistance is about. It seems to us that in throwing the fact of worker resistance, as it were, into the teeth of an obstinate Bravermanian

structuralism, writers on the labour process have in effect ignored the need to explore the dimensions of such resistance and have in many ways taken for granted that it revolves around the issues with which they have been preoccupied, ie the content of work and its associated political and social relationships.

In focussing on the question of the actual issues involved in worker resistance and acquiescence, then, we undertook first of all, in Chapter 4, an empirical survey of published case studies (our own being presented in Chapters 6 and 7) in order both to identify these issues and to explore the nature of workers' everyday experience of the labour process in relation to them.

Our overall finding, which accorded with the theoretical hypotheses advanced earlier in the thesis, was that the content of worker response (and indeed managerial objectives) in relation to the labour process was overwhelmingly economistic; and that, while it might seem a contradiction in terms, this applied also to the rationale of worker acquiescence. Approaching the material via a critique of the use by labour process writers of Goodrich's concept of a "frontier of control", we showed that those areas of "discipline and management" which according to Goodrich himself were seen not only by management but by most workers as beyond the "borderline" of their own concerns, were not in fact the issues primarily contested by workers.

That workers and management are seen, by both "sides", as having separate spheres of interest (or, in Haworth and Ramsie's phrase, differing "universes") is argued in more detail in the following chapter when we consider workers' "pragmatic acceptance" of the economic structure in which they find themselves. Meanwhile our initial survey of the findings of Edwards and Scullion's detailed series of case studies in The Social Organisation of Industrial Conflict established

the primacy of an effort/reward nexus for workers' struggles which the examination of further case studies would subsequently confirm. Perhaps more fundamentally, the examples provided by Edwards and Scullion also indicated further contradictions lying at the roots of such struggles: first of all the incessant effort of management to shift the balance of the effort-reward relationship in the direction of greater productivity, even where this disturbed a relatively "stable" pattern of industrial relations and was thus counterproductive (a phenomenon seen clearly in our own first case study); and secondly the undermining of workers' (particularly shop stewards') own acceptance of the legitimacy of managerial norms of production by action in defence of their own immediate interests - a syndrome referred to by Edwards and Scullion as "non-directed conflict". Both these significantly contradictory patterns of managerial and worker response were discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

The empirical material which followed our consideration of Edwards and Scullion, which was derived mainly from three case studies of women factory workers (although "male" material from Working for Ford and Nichols and Beynon's Living With Capitalism is also used) was examined under the headings of workers' experience of the intensification and abstraction of labour, followed by the time-money nexus and examples of overt resistance by workers. It was found that, in correspondence with our theoretical argument, substantial amounts of the case study material dealt with the centrality of the incessant pressure for output on workers' experience of the labour process, and that it is this dimension of effort, rather than the substantive content of their work, which constructed its meaning for the workers concerned. However, perhaps the key finding consisted in the rigorous interlocking of work measurement and production targets with the levels of reward received by workers, an issue discussed in detail above. In the

same way, norms of production were continually raised so that the objective of maximising surplus value was furthered by a simultaneous increase in productivity and decrease in reward.

The effort/reward nexus, then, was defined as central to workers' experience of the labour process, underlined by their precarious relationship to subsistence itself; and, finally, the same immanent conflict between effort and reward was seen as giving rise to those instances of overt resistance, such as "downers" and strikes, which are recounted in the case studies. Ultimately, if overt conflict occurred, it was seen to be over such "bottom-line" issues as pay awards, rate-cutting under the bonus system, productivity deals - issues around which workers had no choice but to resist if they were to maintain their existing standards of living or even, in the case of our own first case study, their jobs. The resistance may not always have been successful, but it was one into which workers were propelled by the very status of their work as the use-value of a saleable commodity. And, as we argued in the next chapter, it is precisely the necessity of this resistance and its roots in the subsistence-related aspects of exploitation that lends it a political potential and resonance not apparent, beyond a first glance, in the conception of "control"-related resistance propounded by writers on the labour process.

It was this "political side of economism" that we sought to define in our next chapter. The purpose of the chapter, expanding on a theme again central to the thesis as a whole, was to go beyond the position implied within the labour process debate that worker struggles are to be taken seriously only insofar as they are overtly "political" and to show that struggles which are in reality economic in fact have a fundamental political meaning. We set about this task in two ways: firstly via an argument as to the essentially dynamic nature of worker struggles and their relation to class consciousness, and secondly

through locating, in contrast to the Western Marxist emphasis on hegemony and similar superstructural constraints, the crucial undermining role of contradictions at the base and their expression in workers' struggles.

The first argument was approached through a critical analysis of the generally negative view of "economism" espoused by political and industrial theorists from Lenin in What Is To Be Done? to Goldthorpe and Lockwood in their study of "affluent workers". Both approaches were related to what was criticised as the static and mechanistic model of "class consciousness" contained in the three- or four-part typologies put forward by authors such as Mann and Giddens; here certain ideological preconditions such as "class identity", "class opposition" and the fully-fledged conception of an "alternative order" are seen as being necessary before workers can be accounted fully class-conscious.

Such tabulations were criticised as overlooking the fact that developments in class consciousness are engendered by and within struggle; and also that such struggle is an uneven, unpredictable, explosive process in which apparently irredeemably "parochial" perspectives on the part of workers may suddenly expand into a much wider challenge to industrial or political domination. To recognise this is to locate a further implication of critiques of "economism" stemming from such alternative models of fully-fledged class consciousness; that no possibility appears thereby to exist for everyday worker struggles to break through the "charmed circle" of ruling-class ideology. It was this assumption that we sought to challenge in the final part of this chapter, which dealt with the "underminings" inherent in the contradictions of capitalism. Based on the postulation of a "gap" in consciousness where many theorists have envisaged a positive acceptance of the dominant ideology, this argument was extended to focuss on the key concept of "pragmatic acceptance", the phrase used by Michael Mann to describe workers'

attitudes to overall social inequalities, in its analysis of the nature of working-class consciousness and response. Because in this perspective workers are neither wholly entrapped by or rejecting of ruling-class ideology, but largely, in their own lives, indifferent to it, a space is created into which the material pressures endemic within those lives can find their expression in acts of resistance.

In this sense we have argued that ruling-class ideology and hegemonic forces, while clearly crucial to the operation of a class society, exist at a different level from the everyday experience of contradictions within capitalism, such as exploitation, which in fact continually undermine, in their sporadic surfacing, just these superstructural elements. Critiques of classical Marxism such as those stemming from Althusser appear to reverse this point in their insistence that base-superstructure theory involves a crude model of the economic base determining the superstructure. In fact another meaning can be found for a theory which maintains the ongoing significance of the economic relations in society through showing that these relations are both definitional to that society's mode of production and are also themselves essentially contradictory. In this way the continuing "relevance" of the economic base can be acknowledged through the understanding of how the contradictions of surplus value production, most obviously within the labour process, actually prevent the untrammelled maintenance of ruling-class hegemony.

Finally, in seeking theoretical support for a more dialectical alternative to the essentially pessimistic models both of "class consciousness" and hegemonic domination, we turned to Gramsci. Through citing Gramsci's insights into the "conflicting consciousness" of the "man in the mass" we attempted both to provide another pointer to the political significance of workers' "practical activity" and also to go on from this to develop a concept of "praxis" in which worker organisation and experience are



seen as having, at least potentially, a cumulative effect in building a "storehouse" of working-class consciousness. We concluded this section with a brief discussion of the much-neglected topic of reformism and what are again seen as its contradictory tendencies and implications.

### Empirical "Evidence"

In the foregoing we have attempted to present the main theoretical hypothesis and innovations of this thesis, which can be summed up as the argument that exploitation rather than "control" is the central relationship of the capitalist labour process and that the contradictions in this relationship express themselves in "economistic" forms of worker response. Two empirical case studies were undertaken for the thesis through which we hoped to explore how these hypotheses might relate to the "real world" of labour and capital. We shall now briefly summarise the material gained from these studies and attempt to assess their confirmation or otherwise of the theoretical arguments.

As we saw in Chapters 6 and 7, the structure of and relations within the labour process of both studies revolved around the kind of labour time/money nexus explored in the theoretical part of the thesis. In the case of the first plant, Landis & Gyr, the central issue was that of "performance"; in the second, BOC Wembley, a contradictory relationship between managerial and worker objectives on overtime and manning.

Both studies addressed the same basic range of issues; for the workforce, the immediate impact and meaning of the labour process, levels of effort, reward and the relationship between them, willingness to work, worker knowledge and finally attitudes towards resistance; for management, the nature of managerial objectives, and obstacles seen as posed by the workforce to these, strategies in relation to the organisation of the labour process and dealing with worker resistance,

and finally the approach to the whole issue of "control". In the second case study this issue was probed rather more deeply in terms of the argument that even if management did not on the surface regard the issue of "control" as important (as has been the case at Landis & Gyr) nevertheless "control" approaches could be regarded as relevant to the tackling of worker resistance. The sequence of events from managerial objectives, worker response, obstacles to managerial objectives and methods of dealing with those obstacles was therefore gone through with the BOC management.

While both studies were rich in material, there was little in either to lead us to seriously question our theoretical propositions, and we would maintain that this was not a question of interpretation. The predominance of economic issues and attitudes was overwhelming in both the plants visited; in fact it would have appeared irrelevant or fanciful to suggest that workers were primarily concerned with the qualitative content of their jobs or management with the political subordination of the workforce - both counter-propositions which we sought to test.

It was true that, at Landis & Gyr in particular, such attitudes were evident first of all in workers' somewhat embittered attitude towards the impossibility of producing good quality work and secondly in the more hectoring, aggressive approach of management as compared to that of BOC. But at the same time both sets of attitudes were subordinated

to the far more salient priority of simply getting the work out - in the workers' case for fear of job loss and bonus reduction, in management's in order to conform to the overwhelming "cost" imperatives far more central to their daily lives than those of "control".

Indeed, the case of Landis & Gyr could be said to almost "over confirm" our thesis in its integral connection between performance targets and profitability. BOC Wembley, without such immediate competitive pressures, could again be said to bear out our arguments from a much lower basis of probability in that despite the extremely secure position of the company as a whole, the ruthless efforts currently being made to keep down costs by reducing the workforce were the predominant feature influencing both managerial and worker experience of the labour process.

The contradictory aspects of managerial perspectives as representing the priorities of capitalism, a theme which has recurred through the thesis as a whole, were central features of both studies. In both cases, managers' overwhelmingly quantitative definitions of and objectives within the labour process contrasted and conflicted with the less measurable realities both of workers' capacity and their ultimate resistance. As we have mentioned earlier both in these conclusions and in Chapter 4, the ultimate capitalist objective of having workers perform with the consistency and predictability of machines is continually confounded both by the different levels of energy available to workers during the day and also by the unpredictability of the material world in terms of machine breakdowns, traffic jams etc - an unpredictability which, paradoxically, could be managed if management were able to abandon the exclusively quantitative approach to the organisation of work.

However, as we argued in our theoretical analysis, they are unable to do this precisely because of the relentless pressures of cost and competition, and this inability to, as it were, stop and consider was well attested

to in both the studies in terms of management's denial or evasion of the empirical evidence often literally before their eyes of workers' inability to meet some production targets.

This paradoxical denial of "reality" in the interests of meeting urgent (but thereby only partly attainable) production goals was echoed in the managerial attitude to worker resistance. Thus in the Landis & Gyr case the knowledge that, first of all, large sections of workers had not accepted the recent "performance" agreements and, secondly, that the impact of these agreements was clearly against the interests of these and other groups, was suppressed through the nonchalant assumption that occasional "firefighting" would inevitably be necessary to deal with the resultant conflict. Among the more sophisticated management of BOC, while the workers' case was implicitly acknowledged on the one hand and an approach of compromise and "communication" favoured formally, managers referred to worker resistance in technical terms and were unable to accept, beyond the point at which it became more than an irritant, that such resistance could be "logical". Indeed, while on the one hand overtime was used as an indispensable incentive in order to maintain production, its manipulation by the workforce as a means of enhancing subsistence was defined by the Branch Manager as centred on a "mystique" counterposed to the quantitative logic involved in work measurement. At the same time, it was clear in both studies that such quantitative objectives far outweighed any political considerations of "control" in managers' minds.

On the issue of worker resistance, the situations at Landis & Gyr and Wembley BOC respectively could be said to bear out the "positive" and "negative" implications of our thesis on economism and its implications. In both cases there was little doubt that the tenor

and content of resistance was overwhelmingly economistic - workers "pragmatically accepted", for example, the need to work for the employer, an acceptance itself economistic in its implicit acknowledgement of the commodity status of labour, but also demonstrating that worker resistance would not focus around the essentially political issue of what would ultimately be a challenge to capitalist relations of production. Rather, in both cases it was issues much "closer to home" - job security and the effort/reward relationship - which eventually spurred workers into overt resistance, an act, whatever the myths surrounding industrial relations, that is seldom undertaken lightly.

The economistic nature of this spur had, however, for the two groups of employees, different dimensions and implications. For the Landis & Gyr workers, as we saw, it propelled a previously inexperienced section of workers into a hard-fought strike which was the longest in the company's history and, while only partially successful, undoubtedly put the company to some strain and expense. The nature of this resistance was clearly "explosive" - literally the day after saying that they saw any action as pointless, the workers had left their machines. A previously passive and fatalistic workforce was thus swept into resistance and solidarity through a purely economic pressure.

For the BOC workers, on the other hand, sporadic and, in the past, successful "industrial action" was a far more commonplace aspect of their experience. The traditional readiness to take action, consistently around economic issues, continued even in the current recession to be a strength of the workforce, but at the same time the very combativity on subsistence-related issues involved in this traditional of resistance conveyed a parallel tradition of sectionalism which seriously weakened the possibility of any effective resistance to management's long-term strategy at the plant. The economic pressures which pushed workers into resistance, then, were the same which, for "personal gain", as the

management put it, led them into the kind of jealous guarding of overtime which left each workgroup to fend for itself. At the same time, just as the defeat at Landis & Gyr must be seen as having the probable outcome of renewed passivity and defeatism (although at the close of research there were signs of renewed indignation at management tactics) there was no reason to assume that the serious problem on job security and overtime reduction now facing the workforce at BOC would not push them into an enforced unity.

Our own case studies, then, much like the published studies reviewed in Chapter 4 (indeed, with still greater clarity in some instances) appear to confirm the overall theoretical conclusions reached in the thesis as a whole; that both managerial objectives in the organisation of the labour process and worker experience of and response to that process revolve around a nexus of surplus value and exploitation. Our interest, in exploring this empirical material, has been in both structure and response; and this dual approach is taken up in the first of two theoretical summaries of overall themes in the thesis.

### Overall Themes

#### (i) Subjectivity and Objectivity

It has been argued that in attempting to correct what has been seen as the "mechanistic" framework of Braverman, writers in the labour process debate have persistently ignored the actual content of worker response in favour of an elusive dynamic of "control" in which the basic struggle to defend standards of living rarely gains recognition in its own terms. It is the worker's personal or psychological response to the experience of work itself, the impact of production on the individual in terms of "autonomy", "oppression", etc that are taken as the central focus of debate rather than more humdrum issues of pay or job security.

In contrast the present thesis has attempted to redress the balance between individual experience and objective structure through reintegrating the actuality of workers' economic struggles into the theoretical consideration of the labour process. This task has been pursued through the groups of arguments already reviewed in these conclusions: a critique of the "control" thesis, the attempt to establish an alternative theory of the specifically capitalist labour process, and an "economic" theory of worker resistance and acquiescence. The purpose of these arguments, then, while they have attempted to locate a specific economic framework for worker response in the production relations of capitalism, has not been to deny the relevance of the subjective but rather to reassert the central role of objective economic factors in shaping worker response. In this sense it represents a bringing together of subjective and objective within the framework of the material realities of capitalism.

Thus the existence of feelings of "alienation" and resentment by workers at their personal degradation has been acknowledged in full within the thesis (cf chapters 2 and 4 in particular). At the same time such responses have been drawn into an analysis which locates them as underlying and fuelling more overt forms of resistance without themselves being seen as an explicit priority for struggle among workers. The consideration of worker response is thus carried beyond the purely "humanistic" to its actual expression as a phenomenalisation of capitalist production relations. In this way it has been possible to indicate a dynamic (cf chapter 4b) between underlying themes of resentment and hostility and the propulsion of often previously passive workers into resistance against the invasions of capitalism.

To fully articulate the nature of worker response requires both a recognition of and attention to existing struggles and also an analysis of the objective structure within which "subjective" response can be

adequately understood. The description which Braverman provided in Labour and Monopoly Capital of changes in capitalist production over the past hundred years was an attempt to delineate that structure; indeed, Braverman himself saw this work as a "precondition" for the task of understanding working-class consciousness. As he puts it in "Two Comments", a reply made shortly before his death to some of the criticisms that had already been forthcoming of Labour and Monopoly Capital:

"...the value of any analysis of the composition and social trends within the working population can only lie in precisely how well it helps us to answer questions about class consciousness...It was my interest in that very question of class consciousness, in fact, which led to my taking up the entire study in the first place. When I did so, however, I already had the firm conviction that little purpose would be served by a direct attack on the subject, since it did not appear to me in any condition to yield to such an attack. Two major preconditions seemed to me to be lacking. The first has to do with the lack of a concrete picture of the working class, what it is made up of, the trends of income, skill, exploitation, 'alienation' and so forth among workers...etc. I thought that my efforts might best be directed toward helping to fill this gap" (Braverman, 1976, 122).

In effect Braverman's book provides us with a picture of how the constraints bearing on the employer and managerial side of the capital/labour relation in terms of the requirements of profitability have forced certain forms of work organisation characterised by deskilling and the separation of mental and manual labour to emerge. While equally concerned with the effects of the objective of surplus value extraction on the labour process, this thesis has sought also to draw out the implications of the "other side" of this central objective, namely exploitation and its impact on the experience and



response of the workforce in terms both of the intensification of labour and the struggle for subsistence.

Both these approaches have attempted to understand capitalism on its own terms, to get to grips with its internal contradictions, rather than locating contradictions between the capitalist labour process itself and some theoretically more "natural" or "rational" labour process. The same point can be applied to worker response. The realms of the subjective and objective within capitalism can be brought together by acknowledging the relevance of workers' own conceptual framework of capitalism as the system within which they operate and which is the only one they know. In this sense the Marxist notion of "fetishism" can be taken on for both capitalists and workers, not as an illusion which can somehow be exposed to reveal the absurdity of the whole, but as a system of relations which actually shapes both managerial strategy and worker response.

#### (ii) Contradictions

This acknowledgement of the dimensions of the existing system and its essentially fetishised relationships is central to our second overall theme, which is concerned with contradiction. Here we have attempted to emphasise two points: firstly the systemic and secondly the undermining character of contradictions within the capitalist mode of production and labour process.

In the first aspect of this argument we have been concerned, and have argued that other writers on the labour process ought also to be concerned, with the contradictions intrinsic to capitalism in our analysis of the capitalist labour process. It was suggested earlier that the preoccupation of many writers on the labour process with the contradiction between capitalist "illogicalities" in the organisation of work and the qualitative requirements of an ahistorical labour

process indicates a mistaken location of contradictions between rather than within systems which is inadequate for understanding the dimensions of the capitalist labour process. It may now be further suggested that this evasion of an overall conceptual framework in terms of the location of labour process issues within the specific framework of capitalism may be responsible for many of the ventures by labour process theorists into the wider reaches of contingency theory, etc., which have been criticised as taking us not far beyond a conventional industrial sociology.

Apart from this perhaps insular point, two more fundamental misapprehensions can be identified in the particular location of contradictions referred to above. The first is the implication that capitalism can somehow work in a way that is not indicated by capitalist relations of production. But, as we have argued, the reality is that capitalist production imposes such "illogicalities" as heirarchical production, separation of conception and execution, etc., precisely because this is the logic of capitalist relations of production. Such organisation is not engendered by an irrational drive for power but by the requirement of profitability which constitutes these relations.

The second misapprehension relates to the persistent identification of work itself, in the qualitative sense, as the site both of contradictions and the dynamic of worker response. In fact we have seen that neither workers nor management are primarily concerned to contest the terrain of work organisation as such. Rather the object of contest is the fetishised form of relations to which capitalism gives rise - work as value, both for the capitalist in the form of surplus value and for the worker as the wage.

In this way it is not the "exposure" of the fetish which is placed on the agenda of conflict between labour and capital, but the working out of the contradictions within these fetishised relations themselves. When, for example, Carol Johnson in her paper on "The Problem of Reformism and Marx's Theory of Fetishism" queries Marx's failure to integrate his analysis of fetishism into an overall theory of reformism, what is absent is the recognition that these fetishised relationships actually construct capitalism itself. To focus on their exposure as a strategy for overthrowing the system invokes a purely idealist perspective, a toothless weapon in contrast to which Marx, whether deliberately or not, ~~emphasise~~praxis, the growth of opposition in the context of a struggle which itself is engendered by economic contradictions.

If we accept this point, central to our own thesis, that it is the underlying contradictions within capitalism itself which structure the organisation of and response to the labour process, then certain implications follow as to the nature of resistance and conflict. The first of these is that conflict will not centre round, as has frequently been suggested, the relations of production in themselves. The position of the worker in capitalist society is that of a seller of labour power, a position stepped into in an already existing and largely unquestioned structure rather than one requiring conscious "reproduction". These are the relations of production which construct the world that workers find themselves in.

Yet, secondly, the contradictory nature of these relations mean that this cannot be a passive "occupancy". Just as the whole rationale of production for surplus value within capitalism imposes specific

requirements on the owners and managers of capital, so the same structure involves workers in a process of sale of labour power and creation of surplus value the terms of which are continually contested. The whole mode of production under capitalism is based on a contradiction, that between surplus and subsistence. As such there is in a sense no need to evoke explicit political conflict at the level of opposition to the existing relations of production; conflict arises from those relations of production themselves and expresses itself in terms of an intrinsic antagonism at the heart of the capitalist labour process.

We have argued throughout that the invocation of economic base in relation to superstructure need not imply a sterile relation of determinism; rather that the recognition of the contradictions within that base are crucial for the understanding of the actual nature of worker response to the labour process and also for the ability to move beyond classifications and typologies to the awareness that worker resistance is a dynamic, fluid, explosive process, triggered almost certainly by the material pressures imposed on workers but capable of reaching beyond this to embrace a critique of the relations of production which impose such pressures. What we have argued is that it is the intrinsic contradictions of capitalism as experienced daily within the labour process which trigger such a process, rather than any fully-fledged awareness of or concern about capitalist relations of production on the part of workers whose means of life are tied up with this system. The conception of worker response and resistance as thus structured and propelled by a shared experience of the impact of capitalist contradictions provides us with a conceptual basis not only for assessing workers' current industrial struggles but also for analysing some of the emergent tendencies both in production and in class structure and consciousness. It is to these tendencies that we turn in our concluding section.

#### 4) Bad Futures and Good

Despite some of the more optimistic arguments within our own thesis as to the political potential of economic workers' struggles, the prognosis for the future of the working class seems in Britain at least to be one of unmitigated gloom. The old structures whereby the organised working class has sustained its organisation and strength in the post-war period appear particularly in the wake of the miners' strike to be finally breaking down. The rapid spread of casual and sub-contracted work in the "black economy", typified in the large-scale re-emergence of the "lump" in the building industry, brings the destruction of organised trade unionism and other workers' defences which in the past have ensured an acceptable level of working conditions in its train. What is more, the development of the new technology "sunrise industries" at the opposite end of this spectrum of technological decline appears to promote exactly equivalent tendencies in the elimination of trade unionism. One-union, no-strike or "pendulum" agreements vitiate what gestures towards trade union organisation remain, while the "leading edge" organisations in the field of new technology such as science parks lead the anti-union tide with their ideology of "clean work, dirty unions" (Cohen and Massey, 1984).

What Burawoy has termed the "new despotic production politics of the contemporary period" appears to have found an echo in the leadership of the labour movement itself in the concept of "new realism" which has been described as a logical extension of those tendencies of compromise and accommodation already present in traditional reformism. What is more, as Michael Terry (1984) points out and our own case study at BOC confirmed, the brutal fact of widespread redundancies has itself effectively weakened organisation at plant level through the removal "at a stroke" of large sections of more experienced shop stewards.

So where are the grounds for optimism? Some can be found in the knowledge that all this has happened before - the organised working class has at an earlier stage in Britain been defeated, torn apart by its own sectionalism and timidity, and subjected to repressive ruling class legislation and ideological manipulation. True, the re-creation of effective working-class organisation from the nadir took place in the context of a post-war "affluence" which is now little more than a bitter memory. But industrial production within capitalism still continues, and with it the grounds for resistance. As production breaks new ground, both nationally in the growth of micro-electronics and internationally in terms of the relocation and restructuring of capital, new sections are continually brought into the confrontation with the system.

The development of micro-electronics itself seems to promise a "post-industrial", worker-less future. Yet "chips" still have to be made, and those who make them may not always submit as docilely to Japanese-style management as is suggested in for example Michael Maguire's account of a Northern Irish telecommunications plant. Maguire emphasises the strategy of recruiting young workers as part of an overall attempt to create lifelong loyalty to the firm. However, recent struggles in electronics firms in Scotland suggest that equally young workers are hitting back in demanding their rights to join and organise in a union.

A significant addition to this is the increase in the number of women involved in production with the growth in small-scale, labour-intensive, "dextrous" forms of work. While currently this has gone along with an increased tendency towards part-time, low-paid, unorganised patterns of employment, the exposure of large numbers of comparatively inexperienced workers to the rigours of exploitation and ultra-intensive production is capable of producing, as was shown

by the women at Landis & Gyr, a "backlash" more sustained and determined than that of older, more tired sections.

To some extent, however, the employment of women and youth in labour-intensive, "super-exploited" sectors of production must be seen as a retrograde step against the overall tendency of capitalist development in the direction of the wholesale computerisation, and thus automation, both of production itself and of the scientific and information-related processes which surround it. In this sense the development of capitalist production can be seen as in logical accord with the tendencies which we have outlined in this thesis, towards the total quantification and abstraction of productive activity. At present such developments are distorted and, in Marx's phrase, "fettered" by the contradictions we have outlined in existing relations of production. In the future they have the potential, though perhaps only within a system free from such contradictions, of freeing the workforce from the drudgery and oppression so eloquently chronicled by writers on the labour process.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abercrombie, Hill & Turner The Dominant Ideology Thesis George Allen  
& Unwin 1984
- Althusser, L. For Marx Penguin 1964
- Baldamus, W. Efficiency and Effort: An Analysis of Industrial Administration  
Tavistock 1961
- Batstone, Boraston & Frenkel Shop Stewards in Action: The Organisation of  
Workplace Conflict and Accommodation Blackwell  
1977
- Beynon, H. Working For Ford Penguin 1973
- Blackburn R. "The Unequal Society" in The Incompatibles ed Blackburn &  
Cockburn Penguin 1967
- Blauner R. Alienation and Freedom University of Chicago Press 1964
- Braverman H. Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the  
Twentieth Century Monthly Review Press 1974
- "Two Comments" Monthly Review Vol 28 1976
- Brighton Labour Process Group "The Capitalist Labour Process" Capital  
and Class 1 Spring 1977
- Brown & Terry "The Future of Collective Bargaining" New Society March 1978
- Bulmer M. (ed) Working Class Images of Society RKP 1975
- Burawoy M. "Towards a Marxist Theory of the Labour Process: Braverman and  
Beyond" Politics and Society 1978
- Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labour Process under  
Monopoly Capitalism Chicago Press 1979
- The Politics of Production Verso 1985
- Carchedi G. On the Economic Identification of Social Classes RKP 1977
- Cavendish R. Women On The Line RKP 1982
- Cohen S. & Massey D. "Clean Work, Dirty Unions: Labour Process and Ideology  
in Science Parks" Conference of Socialist Economists  
paper July 1984
- Cohen G.A. "The Labour Theory of Value and the Concept of Exploitation" in  
Steedman ed. 1981



- Colletti L. From Rousseau to Lenin NLB 1972
- Coombs R. "Labour and Monopoly Capital" NLR 107 1978
- Cressey P. & MacInnes J. "Voting For Ford: Industrial Democracy and the Control of Labour" Capital and Class 11 1980
- "The Modern Enterprise, Shop Floor Organisation and the Structure of Control" International Yearbook of Organisation Studies ed Dunkerley & Salaman 1977
- Cutler, Hindess, Hirst & Hussein Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today RKP 1977
- Davis H. Beyond Class Images Croom Helm 1978
- Dragstedt A (ed) Value: Studies by Karl Marx New Park Publications 1976
- Edwards R. "The Social Relations of Production at the Point of Production" Insurgent Sociologist Vol 6 1978
- Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century Heinemann 1979
- Edwards & Scullion The Social Organisation of Industrial Conflict Blackwell 1982
- Edwardes M. Back From The Brink Pan 1983
- Elger T. "Valorisation and Deskillling: A Critique of Braverman" Capital and Class 7, 1979
- Friedman A. "Responsible Autonomy Versus Direct Control over the Labour Process" Capital and Class 1 1977
- "Worker Resistance and Marxian Analysis of the Labour Process" paper to Nuffield conference 1978
- "Managerial Strategies, Activities, Techniques and Technology: Towards a Complex Theory of the Labour Process" paper to Aston/Umist conference on the Labour Process Spring 1985
- Giddens A. The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies Hutchinson 1973
- Gintis H. & Bowles S. "Structure and Practice in the Labour Theory of Value" Review of Radical Political Economics 1981
- Gleicher D. "A Historical Approach to the Question of Abstract Labour" Capital and Class 21 1983

- Goodrich C. The Frontier of Control Pluto Press 1975
- Gordon D. "Capitalist Efficiency and Socialist Efficiency" Monthly Review  
Vol 28 1976
- Gramsci A. Prison Notebooks Lawrence & Wishart 1971
- Hall S. "The Great Moving Right Show" in Hall & Jacques(eds) The Politics  
of Thatcherism Lawrence & Wishart 1983
- Haworth & Ramsie "Workers of the World Untied!" paper to Aston/Umist  
conference on the Labour Process Spring 1985
- Hill S. Competition and Control at Work Heinemann 1981
- Himmelweit & Mohun "Real Abstractions and Anaomalous Assumptions" in  
Steedman ed., Verso 1981
- Hobsbawm E. The Forward March of Labour Halted Verso 1981
- Hodgson G. "Exploitation and Embodied Labour Time" CSE Bulletin March 1976  
Capitalism, Value and Exploitation Martin Robertson 1982
- Hyman R. "Managerial Stretgies in Industrial Relations and the Control of  
Labour" paper for Seminar on the Theory of the Firm, Finland, 1984
- Johnson C. "The Problem of Reformism and Marx's Theory of Fetishism" New  
Left Review 119 1980
- Johnson R. "Three Problematics of a Theory of Working Class Culture" in  
Working Class Culture, Studies in History and Theory ed. Clarke,  
Crichter and Johnson, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies  
1979
- Kay G. "A Note on Abstract Labour" CSE Bulletin March 1976  
"Why Labour is the Starting Point of Capital" in Elson (ed) Value:  
The Representation of Labour in Capitalism CSE Books 1980
- Lazonick W. "Class Relations and the Capitalist Enterprise:a Critical Ass-  
essment of the Foundations of Marxist Economic Theory" paper  
presented at Conference on Marxism:The Next Two Decades, Univ-  
ersity of Manitoba, Winnipeg, April 1983
- Lenin V.I. Collected Works Lawrence & Wishart 1960 & 1962

- Littler & Salaman "Bravermania and Beyond:Recent Theories of the Labour Process" Sociology May 1982
- MacInnes J. "The Labour Process Debate and the Commodity Status of Labour: Some Problems" paper presented to the Aston/Umist Conference on the Labour Process, Spring 1984
- Mann M. Consciousness and Action Among the Western Working Class Macmillan 1973
- Manwaring & Wood "The Ghost in the Machine:Tacit Skills in the Labour Process" Bay Area Collective Socialist Review 1984
- Marx K. Selected Works Martin Lawrence 1933  
Theories of Surplus Value London 1969  
Grundrisse Penguin 1973  
Capital Volume 1 Penguin 1976
- Meikens-Wood E. "Marxism without Class Struggle?" Socialist Register 1983
- Monds J. "Workers' Control and the Historians:A New Economism" New Left Review 97 1976
- Moorhouse H.F. "Attitudes to Class and Class Relationships in Britain" Sociology 1976
- Newby H. The Deferential Worker Penguin 1977
- Nichols & Beynon Living With Capitalism RKP 1977
- Noble D. "Social Choice in Machine Design:The Case of Automatically Controlled Machine Tools" in Zimbalist (ed) 1979
- Olin Wright E. "The Value Controversy and Social Research" in Steedman (ed) 1981
- Palmer B. "Class,Conception and Conflict:The Thrust for Efficiency, Managerial Views of Labour, and the Working Class Rebellion" Review of Redical Political Economics, Vol 7, 1975
- Pollert A. Girls,Wives,Factory Lives Macmillan 1981
- Roemer J. "New Directions in the Marxian Theory of Exploitation and Class" Politics and Society 3 1982

Salaman G. Class and the Corporation Fontana 1981

Stark D. "Class Struggle and the Transformation of the Labour Process:a Rel-  
ational Approach" Theory and Society 1980

Steedman I. (ed) The Value Controversy Verso 1981

Storey J. Managerial Prerogative and the Question of Control RKP 1983

Taylor P.S. "Labour Time, Work Measurement and the Commensuration of  
Labour" Capital and Class 9 1979

Thompson P. The Nature of Work Macmillan 1983

Westwood S. All Day Every Day Pluto Press 1984

Willis P. Learning to Labour Saxon House 1978

Zimbalist A. (ed) Case Studies on the Labour Process Monthly Review Press  
1979